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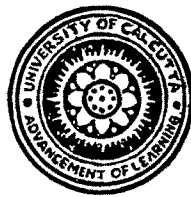
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*Our Homage to*

**KHAGENDRA NATH SEN**

**R. N. SAXENA**

**G. S. GHURYE**

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## SOCIAL FACTORS BEHIND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT— THE CASE OF AN UNDERDEVELOPED REGION

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SWAPAN KUMAR PRAMANICK

A capitalist society is marked by wide disparities in income and differentiation in status. In fact, inequality in such societies is an institutional device to create an urge, in the minds of individuals to improve one's economic condition and social status. Since independence, the Government of India has committed itself to the path of a 'planned economy' to reduce the impact of this capitalist law of development and to ensure a more egalitarian and just social order. But the effort has not been quite successful. The difference between the rich and the poor is increasing and, with the passage of time, more and more people are sinking below the 'poverty line'.

Another disquieting feature is noticeable in Indian society. Different regions are growing at differential rates. Capital and technological investments are being made in such a manner as to favour some particular regions. The growth of the Western region is most phenomenal in modern India whereas the eastern region has lagged far behind others in the rate of growth. Various factors account for such a situation. The nature of governmental decisions and the nature of influence of various lobbies, the social composition of the business class, the nature of the infrastructural facilities which are made available—all these have accentuated the difference between different regions in Indian society. One can say that this is a general trend noticeable in the developing societies in general. As G. Myrdal observed "...while the regional inequalities have been diminishing in the richer countries of Western Europe, the tendency has been the opposite in poorer ones".<sup>1</sup>

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### *What is a Region ?*

Before going into the discussion of the factors behind the under-development of North Bengal region, which is our concern in this paper, we should make it clear what is meant by a region. A region generally refers to a contiguous geographical unit which possesses certain common economic, social, political or developmental attributes. There is a specific way of demarcating the territorial boundary of a region. It is not that the people of a region must be homogeneous or must possess all the attributes in common. But the inter regional variations must be greater than the intra regional variations and heterogeneities<sup>a</sup>. Another concept important in connection with regions is the concept of relativity. A region refers to a category in relation a larger one. And these categories are not fixed. In that sense there are always macro and micro regions. Thus we can speak of the third world countries, the South Asian countries or the sub-continental region. Within India, we may refer to various zones such as the eastern zone, the western zone, the northern zone etc. Within the state of West Bengal, we can refer to the North Bengal region in a similar way. The important thing is that when we refer to a region, we must make it clear what are the common spatial or economic attributes of such an area and how it differs from the wider category.

### *The Economic Development of North Bengal.*

The districts which are situated in the north of the river Ganges in West Bengal form what is known as North Bengal. There are five such districts viz., Malda, West Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar & Darjeeling. Particularly before the construction of the Farakka Bridge, there were acute communication problems between these districts and the rest of Bengal. In spite of some internal variations, they are marked by certain common social and economic attributes. There is an emotional basis of unity also in the sense that the people living in this region share a sense of deprivation. They feel that they are being neglected and exploited and that in spite of their vast growth potential, enough attention is not being paid to them. Let us see, from the analysis of the available data, how far these apprehensions are correct.

So far as the economic situation is concerned, there are certain indicators of development. The distribution of urban & rural population and areas, the growth rate of agriculture and industry, literacy rate; number of workers engaged in manufacturing industries etc, are several such indicators. To get a comparative picture, the relevant data of the North Bengal districts have been compared with the situation prevailing in Burdwan and Hooghly, the two developed districts of West Bengal.

TABLE 1  
Urbanization and Literacy Rate, Census 1981

|                 | Urbanization 7% of<br><i>Urban to rural population</i> |       |       | Literacy 7% of<br><i>total population</i> |       |
|-----------------|--|-------|-------|---|-------|
|                 | 1961   | 1971  | 1981  | 1971                                      | 1981  |
| All India       |  | 19.9  | 23.73 | 29.45                                     | 36.17 |
| All West Bengal |  | 24.75 | 26.49 | 33.20                                     | 40.88 |
| Darjeeling      |  | 23.05 | 27.86 | 33.07                                     | 42.52 |
| Cooch Behar     | 6.90   | 6.83  | 6.91  | 21.92                                     | 29.99 |
| Jalpaiguri      | 9.10   | 9.60  | 14.08 | 24.01                                     | 29.88 |
| West Dinajpur   | 7.30   | 9.34  | 11.14 | 22.12                                     | 26.92 |
| Malda           | 4.10   | 4.22  | 4.78  | 17.61                                     | 23.06 |
| Burdwan         | 18.10  | 22.78 | 29.65 | 34.36                                     | 42.84 |
| Hooghly         | 25.90  | 26.47 | 29.54 | 38.82                                     | 48.80 |

Source : Compiled from *Census of India 1981*. West Bengal  
Volume, Provisional Tables.

A few things become evident from the above table. The data on urbanization shows that excepting Darjeeling, all the other districts fall well below the all India and all West Bengal average. The least urbanized district is Malda which shows a paltry 4.78% of its population living in towns. The growth rate of urbanization in all the North Bengal districts has been very marginal with the exception of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. But their growth rate does not indicate that they have become highly urbanised. Urbanization has occurred only in some pockets of the district. We have strong



doubts that immigration from outside West Bengal may account for this growth rate in the two districts. Commenting on this phenomenon, the 1981 Census, has said, "In North Bengal region, Siliguri is one of the rare cases showing very high degrees of urbanization and expanding fast. The rest of the North Bengal area is still almost totally non-urban and perhaps will continue to be so in future." The same trend is noticeable if the literacy rate is analysed. The general literacy rate is very low. Considering education as the most strong inducer of social change, the fact is very discouraging. The picture becomes even more dismal if class wise and sex wise literacy data are compared. For example, the literacy rate among the scheduled castes in the districts of North Bengal was 13.58 in 1961 and 17.80 in 1971 whereas among the Scheduled Tribes it was 6.55 in 1961 and 8.92 in 1971. In Cooch Behar, the literacy rate among the scheduled tribes had even gone down from 10.73 in 1961 to 9.20 in 1971.

TABLE 2

District Level Data on Growth Rates of Population, Urbanization, Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Population, 1961-71.

|               | Population<br>growth rate,<br>1961-71 | Growth<br>rate of<br>urban<br>Popula-<br>tion,<br>1961-71 | Growth<br>rate of<br>non-agri-<br>cultural<br>workers,<br>1961-71 | Growth<br>rate of<br>rural<br>popula-<br>tion,<br>1961-71 | Growth<br>rate of<br>male<br>culti-<br>vators<br>1961-71 | Growth<br>rate of<br>agricul-<br>tural<br>labourers<br>1961-71 |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| 1. Cooch      |                                       |   |   |   |  |  |
| Behar         | 38.67                                 | 35.27   | 5.43  | 38.92   | 14.38  | 156.97   |
| 2. Jalpaiguri | 28.75                                 | 35.75   | -2.67   | 28.05   | 11.54  | 264.45   |
| 3. West       |                                       |   |   |   |  |  |
| Dinajpur      | 40.49                                 | 75.49   | 3.33  | 37.66   | 16.74  | 70.19  |
| 4. Malda      | 31.97                                 | 33.94   | -37.59  | 31.09   | 9.87   | 189.65   |
| 5. Burdwan    | 27.03                                 | 58.97   | -11.69  | 19.92   | -4.82  | 88.79  |
| 6. Hoogly     | 28.71                                 | 31.24   | 2.41  | 27.82   | -3.01  | 87.32  |

Compiled from : Asok Mitra and Shekhar Mukherjee—*Population, Food and Land Inequality in India, 1971*, Allied, 1980.

The table on growth rate shows clearly the virtual absence of development both in the rural and in the urban sectors. The proportion of non-agricultural workers has actually slumped down in three districts. Given the absolutely low rate of urban population in the districts of North Bengal, the tempo of urbanization should have been far greater. But that has not been the case. Regarding the levels of urban development, the four North Bengal districts occupy lowest rank along with some other districts. Again, the number of workers engaged in manufacturing industries is a good indicator of development. The corresponding figures per thousand of population in 1961 was Burdwan—38, Hooghly—20, Jalpaiguri—6, Cooch Behar—5, West Dinajpur—5, Malda—6. Data regarding industrial and commercial power consumption show that in the early 60's about 95% of West Bengal's total power consumption was made in Calcutta agglomeration and in the Assansol—Durgapur industrial region. The share of North Bengal's five districts in industrial and commercial power consumption was even less than 0.5%<sup>8</sup>. This shows that, starting from the British period, there has actually occurred a 'deindustrialization' process in this vast area. R. P. Dutt says, "The real picture of modern India is a picture of what has been aptly called deindustrialization, i. e., the decline of old handicraft industry without the compensating advance of modern industry. The advance of factory industry has not overtaken the decay of handicraft. The process of decay characteristic of the 19th century has been carried forward in the 20th century and in the post-war period"<sup>4</sup>.

As Table 2 shows, the situation is even more deplorable in the agricultural field. The rural scene is characterized by the growth of a vast army of agricultural labourers. In ten years, agricultural labourers have increased by 264.45 per cent in Jalpaiguri, 189.65 per cent in Malda and 156.97 per cent in Cooch Behar. The growth rate of the male cultivators is negligible as compared to this. Bankruptcy in the field of agriculture will be further confirmed by the following table.

TABLE 3  
Agricultural Productivity and Growth Level, 1962-73

|                  | Average Agricultural productivity level Rs/ hectare for 1962-65 to 1970-73 | Average Agricultural growth Rate, 1962-65 to 1970-73 | Population Density person/hectare of gross cropped area for 1971 |
|------------------|--|--|--|
| 1. Cooch Behar   | 1351   | 1.88   | 4.04   |
| 2. Jalpaiguri    | 1371   | 2.62   | 5.52   |
| 3. West Dinajpur | 1235   | 2.39   | 3.03   |
| 4. Malda         | 1125   | 3.07   | 4.87   |
| 5. Burdwan       | 1802   | 2.02   | 7.16   |
| 6. Hooghly       | 1983   | 4.25   | 10.27  |

Source : Sunil Munshi—*Calcutta Metropolitan Explosion (1975)*

Again, the contrast between population growth rate and agriculture growth rate is noticeable. Thus, in Malda, population grew by 31.97 per cent whereas agricultural production grew by 3.07 per cent, in West Dinajpur, the figures are 40.49 and 2.39 respectively, in Cooch Behar 38.67 per cent and 1.88 per cent and in Jalpaiguri 28.75 per cent and 2.62 per cent. We will have to remember that agricultural productivity per hectare is abysmally low in these districts as compared to even other districts of West Bengal, not to speak about the states where 'green revolution' has occurred. The vast growth potential in the field of agriculture has remained unexplored in these areas even after 35 years of independence.

#### *Not North Bengal Alone*

The question is whether this virtual absence of growth is characteristic only of the North Bengal districts. If it is found that all the 'South Bengal' districts have grown both in the fields of agriculture and Industry, then one can validly argue that in the implementation of development projects, North Bengal has been systematically discriminated against. That would also validate the growth of a strong regional sentiment to counter this trend. But available data show that barring a few districts in and around Calcutta, all the

other areas have remained backward and stagnant. Calcutta has become the centre of growth whereas all the peripheral districts are starving. This is a structural heritage we have derived from our colonial rulers and no strong and systematic measure to counter this tendency is in sight as yet. The North Bengal districts thereby reflect a general trend. In some of the districts, as for example, in Malda, the problem may be more acute but that does not mean that the situation is unique to the North Bengal districts alone. Some of the districts, Bankura and Purulia for example, fall also in the same category. The following tables will bear this out.

TABLE 4

Contribution to West Bengal Income by District 1960-61.

|  | p. c. of<br>total po-<br>pulation | p. c. of<br>total<br>income | Agricul-<br>ture | Industry |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Lowest stratum—Darjeeling,<br>Cooch Behar,<br>Purulia, Malda | 12.11                             | 6.79                        | 10.41            | 3.56     |
| Second stratum—Bankura, Birbhum,<br>West Dinajpur            | 12.70                             | 10.69                       | 19.81            | 4.53     |
| Third stratum—Jalpaiguri,<br>Nadia,<br>Murshidabad           | 15.32                             | 13.95                       | 23.07            | 7.37     |
| Fourth stratum—Howrah, Hooghly,<br>Midnapore                 | 24.67                             | 23.44                       | 22.89            | 27.86    |
| Highest stratum—Burdwan, 24 Par-<br>ganas, Calcutta          | 35.20                             | 45.13                       | 23.82            | 56.68    |
|  | 100.00                            | 100.00                      | 100.00           | 100.00   |

Source : Government of West Bengal—*Estimates of State Income and its Regional Differentials (1965)*

TABLE 5

Distribution of Districts of West Bengal by  
per capita income class, 1961.

| <i>Per capita income</i> | <i>Name of the districts in order</i>                                |
|--------------------------|--|
| Below Rs. 200            | Purulia  |
| Rs. 201—250              | Bankura, Midnapore, Cooch Behar, Malda.                              |
| Rs. 251—300              | Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia, Darjeeling, 24 parganas, West Dinajpur. |
| Rs. 301—350              | Jalpaiguri, Hooghly.   |
| Rs. 351—above            | Burdwan, Howrah.   |

Source : Dhires Bhattacharyya [ed] —*Focus on West Bengal* (1972)  
Article by A. K. Maikap—Regional imbalance in West Bengal.

Analysis of the economic status of the various districts in West Bengal shows that though the districts in North Bengal do not occupy any enviable position, underdevelopment and low industrialization is not confined to them alone. Per capita income is a strong indicator of economic position and this is highly correlated with factors like urbanism, literacy rate, extent of metal road, health etc., Most of the districts of West Bengal suffer from a lack of basic infrastructural facilities from this standpoint. Industrialization has occurred only in the calcutta metropolitan area and in the Asansol-Durgapur industrial complex. Systematic efforts to develop agricultural inputs like irrigation, technical know-how, chemicals, improved seeds have also been made on a random and unscientific basis. Economic development of West Bengal reveal the spectre of apoplexy at the centre and anaemia at the periphery.

*The Structural or the Economic Factors :*

What are the basic reasons for such underdevelopment ? There is a large degree of unanimity on the point that the structural or the economic factors play a crucial role. The constitutional scheme for

the allocation of financial resources between the centre and the state has proved to be defective as most of the development functions have been entrusted with the states whereas most of the resources are at the hands of the centre. And in the race for getting a larger share of central assistance, the Eastern region as a whole has lagged far behind the other regions.<sup>5</sup> Again, whatever meagre resources are available to the state, it has not been systematically invested from a long term perspective. Lack of capital, under-utilization of existing resources, wrong investment and a wrong set of priorities and goals have cumulatively resulted in such a situation.

In the agrarian field, radical land reform measures, the programme for which was adopted by the Congress Economic Programmes Committee as early as in 1947, has not yet been implemented. A vast number of people operate below the poverty line and their number is increasing. The provisional 1981 Census report shows that in India the percentage of main workers to total population increased from a meagre 27.91% in 1971 to 28.47% in 1981. And the main workers were those who remained in gainful employment for more than six months in a year. That signifies the existence of a vast array of unemployed and dependent population in the villages. There has been a staggering increase in the number of landless labourers as well. In Jalpaiguri, from 1961 to 1971 there had been an increase of landless labourers by 264 per cent and in Malda it grew by 190 p. c. over the same period. It would not be an exaggeration to say that agrarian economy is on the verge of collapse.<sup>6</sup> A classification of peasant-cultivators by size-class holdings would also show that there has been a steady increase in the number of peasants having uneconomic holdings. As far as the marketing of agricultural products are concerned, the market and the price systems do not operate favourably for the peasant. The farmers are the worst sufferers of seasonal glut. Lack of storage facilities, inadequate transportation facilities and fluctuation in prices go against the interests of the farmers.

Regional imbalance in the state, according to A. K. Maikap, can be done away with by developing what he says, the growth centres of micro-region, i. e., the market towns catering to the needs of the hinterland in the sub-region. These growth centres must be turned

into viable economic units and they must be organizationally linked with similar such growth centres in other parts.<sup>7</sup> Small twons thereby provide an important fillip to development. But these small towns and urban areas have been deteriorating ever since the British period. Francis Buchanon in his *An Account of the District of Purnea, 1809-10* mentioned the existence of a hierarchy of urban centres in Malda District. One finds from the accounts of English administrators at that time of the existence of about 61 towns in that area which flourished as trade and manufacturing centres. But with the decay of handicraft industry, all these towns were destroyed. By 1860, one finds the existence of only two towns—Malda and English-bazar.<sup>8</sup> The new towns had a parasitic existence as they were mere administrative centres. The new towns which have been created in post-independent India, are utterly inadequate to meet the developmental needs of the situation.

#### *The Role of the Non-Economic Factors :*

Important and crucial as these structural and economic features are, one cannot simply brush aside the relevance of the social factors, the institutional and moral bases of society and the pattern of socialization. As Baljit Sing says, "In the initial stages of planned development, there is as much the necessity of removing the social, administrative and institutional, including the legal barriers, to economic growth as of direct measures for increasing the output. At a later stage when growth becomes self-sustaining, economic development may lead to social progress. But so long as that stage is not reached, social planning is a necessary, although never a sufficient condition of planned economic development"<sup>9</sup> S. P. Nagendra also says regarding the role of social factors, "What is needed is a clear recognition of the fact that a sound theory of economic growth cannot be conceived in purely economic terms but will have to be firmly grounded upon a theory of cultural change".<sup>10</sup>

The development of the economy depends on an over-all milieu within which it works. The institutional framework of society may be in keeping with the new economic goals or it may retard it. Sociologists of planning have noted the big relevance of these institutional factors for the success of plan programmes. Backward

economies are sustained by a culture which is ascriptive, particularistic and diffuse while the developed economies are supported by a universalistic, specific and achievement oriented type of culture. The type of social structure also varies accordingly. Some primordial factors of status-ascription based on age, kinship, caste etc are in operation in such societies. Rational orientation to life is hardly noticeable. An individual qua individual does not have any place in society. Individual mobility, initiative and drive are not the preferred values. Tradition reigns supreme and there is hardly any place for new.

On the other hand, a developed economy operates within a social framework that provides moral and cultural support to it. It is an 'achievement oriented' society. The socialization pattern operates in such a manner that an individual becomes part of an acquisitive and competitive economic order. Max Weber has shown how Calvinism gave birth in Europe to a new type of individual with some new value preferences like rationalism, economic prosperity and this worldliness. This, according to him, was instrumental to the birth of capitalism in Europe.

The Weberian formula—which was also enunciated by Werner Sombart—that the economic organization is essentially the objectification of the prevailing ethos of the social structure, is one-sided. Values and ideals have hardly worked as independent variables in history. The major bottlenecks behind economic growth are in the sphere of structure and not in the realm of culture. But at the same time one cannot ignore the role of values, institutions and individuals. In circumstances of extensive structural changes, social factors appear to have particular importance for economic growth.

While noting the relevance of cultural factors for economic growth, Smelser has mentioned two aspects of culture which are relevant, viz., the evaluational and the existential aspects. "By evaluational we refer to that which is considered desirable in a system of cultural values; that which ought to be pursued by members of a society. By existential, we refer to assertions concerning what man, society and nature are like."<sup>11</sup> Hinduism, which is a religion of about 80% of the people in India, has its impact both on evaluative and cognitive aspects of culture. It has its own system of preferences as well as its world-view. Many aspects of it are



proving to be cultural pseudomorph to meet the challenges of a growing economy.

The attitude which is typical to subsistence farmers is that once they earn enough to provide for two square meals a day, they become contented. Incentive to work vanishes after the minimum level is reached. This culture is hardly conducive to the establishment of a viable growing economy. Everything is standardized for him ; the food items which he consumes, the crops he grows, the techniques of cultivation which he adopts the persons who work in the field and many others. He develops a 'fixed perspective' to look at others as others also assess him likewise. Whatever little savings one may have, is wasted in the costly rituals and the life-cycle rites. Lambert and Hoselitz say on Hindu rituals, "Increments in family wealth call for increased expenditures on religious rituals. Wedding ceremonies, burial ceremonies and feasts for the dead are sharply graduated by cost... The graduated elaboration of ceremonials can absorb a major portion of surplus income or past savings which might otherwise find economically more productive uses".<sup>12</sup> One may say that the kinship-community-religious ties provide serious obstacles to the growth of entrepreneurial capacity in such a society.

It is true that there are other traits in Hindu religion. Prof. Benoy K. Sarkar has emphasized upon the secular and materialistic orientation of Hindu religion. Many castes have ascended or descended the social ladder on the basis of their economic position. Wealth and prosperity, it may be argued, are not as irrelevant to Hinduism as it is supposed to be. But the general trend in Hindu religion is to idealize a simple and contented life. There is also an adverse relation between social status and manual labour. A person will try to avoid the actual work of cultivation if he can manage to hire a labourer. Low paid office work is considered better than remunerative jobs involving hard physical labour. Such is the impact of 'Baboo' culture on our society. One has to fight hard to eliminate this culture trait. What is needed is to create an 'institutional spur' in favour of work and initiative.

To come to the realm of caste, there are various ways in which caste organization influences the economic organization. The

nature of the caste owning most of the village land influences the nature of farm labour. Where peasant castes own most of the village land, as in the case of the okkaligas of Rampura village studied by Srinivas, much of the production activities relating to land is organized on the basis of family labour. But where Brahmins own most of the land, as in the case of Kumbapettai village studied by Kathlean Googh, production is organized not on the basis of family labour but on the basis of hired labour or tenancy. The stratification picture of these two types of villages will consequentially be different from each other although there may not be much appreciable differences in ownership and size-class of holdings in these two villages.<sup>13</sup> Nair has mentioned of a village in Kerela where there are about 400 *mirasdars*, who own in all 600 acres of cultivable land. But only 10 p. c. of them cultivate land directly, and that too through hired labour whereas the remaining 90 p. c. lease it out to tenants.<sup>14</sup> The growth of absentee landlordism and of sub-tenancy has economic causes but it has also deep social roots. Migration pattern in urban areas and the benefits of westernization have also been diffused in favour of the strongly entrenched castes.

The success of land reform measures in India is related in important ways with the values and norms of a stratified society. In India, there is a close caste-class configuration. The poor and the landless belong mostly to the lower castes whereas the rich landholders belong to the upper and middle caste groups. As such, class inequality is supported by the normative system. Even when rights are granted to tenants and sharecroppers, they are not yet prepared to challenge the entire value system which goes in favour of the landlord. Inequality has become a part of life in Indian society and it is very difficult to eradicate it without creating a strong alternative normative base. Andre Beteille says, "The respect for privilege runs through every level of the social system and pervades the very organisations which are created to bring it to an end .. It is difficult for such measures to strike roots in a society where both the privileged and the underprivileged believe that men are born unequal".<sup>15</sup>

It is an agreed fact that in a highly stratified society, the benefits

of developments are initially cornered by the privileged few and this further increases the distance between them and others. It is a moot question who are benefiting from the India's development efforts. Development indicators like school enrolment, hospital beds, metal roads etc by themselves do not explain every thing, the question of their distribution (who benefits from them), their contents, etc. are also important. If the social benefits have a tendency to reinforce the existing lines of class or caste division so that they go in favour of an already entrenched social group, it will have little impact on general economic growth. Similarly, the contents of the social development programme are of vital importance. An educational system which is dominated by a narrow academic orientation and which was created to cater to the needs of the former colonial rulers, can ill afford to meet the changing necessities of time. An expansion of this type of education will have little impact on the growth dynamics of this country.

If the attempt to harmonize the traditional to modern culture is difficult among the general population, it is more so amongst the tribal people. The tribal values, ethos, life style and economy are sharply different from those of a modernising society. The tribals are in a peculiar dilemma in modern society because they are fast losing their old values without having any new one. The problem of social change and adjustment therefore becomes very critical among them. It has been noticed that the various developmental programmes initiated among the tribes are having two types of effects which do not enrich their general condition. First, a large part of the grant is being appropriated by a few elites among them—thereby creating a class of 'new rich' among them. Secondly even when the commoners are getting these grants, they are spending the amount in unproductive channels or in short-lived revelries. The problem of 'alcoholism' among them is also a result of this difficulty to negotiate cultural change. It seems that sociologists and social anthropologists have a lot to do in trying to remove the maladjustment between culture and economy among the tribes.

#### *Social Backwardness of North Bengal :*

The question is what is the relevance of all these factors for the

economic underdevelopment of the districts of North Bengal? Social backwardness, as we have seen, does have a negative impact on the rate of economic growth. A quick look at the demographic composition of the districts of North Bengal gives us an idea about it.

TABLE 6

Distribution of Religious Groups in North Bengal Districts, 1971

|               | <i>Hinduism</i> | <i>Islam</i> | <i>Other Religions</i> |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Darjeeling    | 81.45           |              | 15.27                  |
| Jalpaiguri    | 86.81           | 8.97         | 3.18                   |
| Cooch Behar   | 78.56           | 21.25        | 0.11                   |
| West Dinajpur | 63.07           | 35.89        | 0.95                   |
| Malda         | 56.63           | 43.13        | 0.22                   |

Source : Census of India, 1971, West Bengal Social and Cultural Tables.

TABLE 7

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Population of the District of North Bengal, 1971.

|                 | Scheduled Caste | Scheduled Tribes | Percentage of S. C. and S. T. Population to total population. |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|---|
| All India       | 14.60           | 6.94             | 21.54   |
| All West Bengal | 19.90           | 5.72             | 25.62   |
| Darjeeling      | 12.57           | 13.89            | 26.46   |
| Jalpaiguri      | 34.02           | 24.49            | 58.51   |
| Cooch Behar     | 47.03           | 0.75             | 47.78   |
| West Dinajpur   | 23.10           | 11.90            | 35.00   |
| Malda           | 16.48           | 8.11             | 24.59   |

Sources : Census of India, 1971, West Bengal, Social and Cultural Tables.

The two Tables reveal that a large part of the population of these districts are Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Census, 1971 had this to say on the point, "The five North Bengal districts lying just below the Hill district of Darjeeling ( Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur ) have the highest concentration of Scheduled castes to the total population. The Scheduled castes actually constitute one-third of the total population of the three districts". In Malda, the Scheduled caste population grew by 62.57% between 1961 to 1971 whereas the general population grew by 31.98%. In fact, Malda registered the highest growth rate of scheduled caste population among all the districts of West Bengal. On the Scheduled Tribe population, the Census, 71 commented that the five North Bengal districts account for more than 35 p. c. of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the State whereas the share of these districts in the total population of the state is only 16.74%.

Assuming that literacy rate is the lowest among the backward sections and the structural barriers for economic development are the highest, it is not surprising that the districts of North Bengal should register such a low rate of growth. Radical change in the structure of the economy is the first need in such a case, but concerted effort to change the old values is also urgently necessary. It is only when new institutions are buttressed by new values that a smooth change-over is possible.

#### NOTE

The Paper is a revised version of the keynote address which was given by the present author at a Seminar organised by Malda Women's College at Malda in August, 1983.

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## MARX'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

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PRAHLAD KUMAR SARKAR

( A )

*Does Marx have a philosophy of history ?*

There is a great debate whether Marx has, at all, a philosophy of history, especially in view of his negative or destructive reaction against the philosophy of history of Hegel and the Young Hegelians. But there seems little substance in any view which denies Marx the title of a philosopher of history. His philosophy of history is 'historical materialism', although we know that Marx did not use this expression and preferred, instead, the use of such expressions as 'the materialist conception of history', 'the materialist interpretation history' etc. Marx evolved his own conception by way of critical analysis and comparison of all prevalent, or rather dominant, conceptions of history. It would however be wrong to believe that Marx's conception has a negative background only. It has its positive foundation in the collection of a mass of historical data derived from the study of earlier forms of society and the observation of the contemporary socio-historical reality as an on-going process. It would not be improper to hold that Marx's conception of history has the history of the formulation of a theory behind it and is, understandably, non-different from it. Here lies the basis of our claim that Marx has a philosophy of history.

( B )

(i) *The most important component of Marx's philosophy of history :*

Marx's philosophy of history has itself become a part of history, as it existed in the past and as it bears upon the present. It may be likened to a great stream in which different cultural disciplines have joined as tributaries. Naturally, the theoretical components of it have been found to be much more diverse than we imagined them to

be. The most significant of its theoretical components, in my opinion, is *philosophical anthropology*, the doctrine, in brief, of the *position* and *role* of man as *master* and *maker* of history. Any serious study of Marx's philosophy of history must be conducted on the basis of his understanding of man's position and role on earth. The 'man' of Marx is not an abstract concept squatting in the world of imagination. He is a living real individual of flesh and blood, with impulses and passions driving towards ends conducive to the well-being of his organism. We must give due importance to the standpoint of philosophical anthropology from which he carried out his works of critical analysis, creative construction and assimilation. Marx had only an attitude of disdain towards criticism from no-standpoint which he regarded as the expression of an anarchic mind given to wanton destruction. It is all too natural therefore that we keep his standpoint firmly in view whenever we attempt a serious critical review of his philosophy of history.

(ii) *The origin of Marx's philosophical anthropology :*

The origin of Marx's philosophical anthropology is to be traced to his revolt against the dehumanisation and debasement of man. It is true that he observed the dehumanized and debased man in his contemporary capitalist society. But he, at first, rose in revolt not against this society but against the *ideologies* and *ideologues* of it. It is primarily a theoretical revolt against a theoretical situation of human debasement or enslavement.

The ground for such a revolt was already contained in Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel's subject-predicate conversion. Hegel makes man an adjunct and an instrument of spirit, a higher power, to serve its end. In political theory, Hegel looks upon the state as a person and society as objectly dependent on it. The monarch is the state personified and all the organs of state as well as society are instrumental to the fulfilment of his subjective will-power. He is the spirit in its concrete embodiment. Spirit alone is the true subject and individuals are "a mass which more or less consciously bears it along" (*The Holy Family*). With Hegel, therefore, 'the history of humanity becomes the abstract spirit of humanity, a spirit above and beyond real man'. (Ibid.)



The Young Hegelians, in spite of their so-called radicalism, stepped into the shoes of Hegel all too eagerly. They had scant respect for men with senses and their material activity. Nor did they have any interest to study men in the process of history. Hence their neglect for human industry as the mediating link between man and nature in the heartland of society. They thus failed to understand that nature, as it exists meaningfully for man, is anthropological out and out and human industry or productive activity is the sole factor making the humanization of nature a reality. Any history that loses the perspective of man and his material activity for the transformation of nature cannot deserve the title of a human history.

It is true that Feuerbach had the perspective of man before him but his attitude was very much contemplative with little concern for the evolution of history. His materialistic appraisal of man as a sensuous being could not cast it contemplative shell as he failed to locate man in history. So his anthropology remained a-historical.

But most of the other Young Hegelians could hardly overcome the spell of Hegel. They continued to produce treatises on history on the understanding that consciousness, especially theological, must come to self-consciousness in and through men. They treated history as the history of consciousness, 'a metaphysical subject of which real individuals are only mere representations' (Ibid).

(iii) *The result of theoretical reaction :*

Marx arrived at a theoretical point of departure. A complete break was effected between a *transcendental, metaphysical and ideological* conception of history and a real or true human history. But where is that point of departure? Marx answer : ".....the moment men are represented as the *authors* and *actors* of their own history, we arrive.....at the real point of departure". (The Poverty of Philosophy). Marx and Engel say again :

".....we must begin by stating the first presupposition of all human existence, and therefore of all history, namely, that man must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history'. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is, therefore, the production of material life itself. This is indeed a historical act, a

fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years of ago, must be accomplished every day and every hour merely in order to sustain human life. ....In any conception of history, therefore, the first requirement is to observe this basic fact in all its significance and all its implications and to give it its proper importance" (The German Ideology).

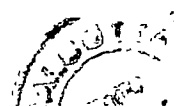
( C )

*The defects of a metaphysical or ideological conception of history :*

For a proper understanding of Marx's philosophy of history it is necessary that we understand all the implications of a defective metaphysical or ideological theory of history.

(a) The metaphysical conception of history lacks in, what Marx and Engels call, an 'earthly basis'. The expression 'earthly basis' is a common denominator of real living individuals, their material activity and their material conditions. If we do not view history as a subject apart, if it does not possess material wealth all on its own and fight battles all for itself, then this earthly basis must have elemental value for any conception of human history. Sometimes Marx and Engels find the earthly basis of history in the productive activity alone for this activity presupposes the existence of real individuals as well the material conditions of production. In neglecting the earthly, material or human basis of history, the speculative metaphysicians and ideologues have made it an object of imaginary construction.

(b) Due to the neglect of *material praxis*, a permanent divorce was effected between nature and history. Material praxis holds the key to our intimate relationship with nature. A distinction is to be drawn, on a primary level, between natural history and human history. Human history has been made what it is by men in the pursuit of their ends. "History is nothing", so remark the authors of *The Holy Family*, "but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends". But Marx does not accept the breach between natural and human history as permanent. The history of humanity provides a varied spectacle of the appropriation of nature by his productive activity. So Marx observes in *Capital*: "Technology discloses



man's mode of dealing with Nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and by which also his social relations, and the mental conceptions that flow from them are formed". Any view that neglects the factor of productive activity will fail to explain the relation between man, his appropriation of nature through industry or technology, his social relations and the mental conceptions that blossom forth on their fertile soil.

(c) If masses and their productive activity are not held in view, if they are treated as mere instruments of a supraterrrestrial power, it is all the more easy to uphold *instrumentalism* as a guiding principle of history. The doctrine of *divine dispensation*, *divine authorisation* will then receive our easy support. To the question, who has made history, we will readily answer, the Messiahs, the Avtaras, the chosen people or race of God on earth. With reference to the supernaturalists and instrumentalists Marx and Engels observe :

"The exponents of this conception of history have consequently only been able to see in history the political actions of Princes and States, religions and all sorts of theoretical struggles, and in particular have been obliged to share in each historical epoch *the illusion of that epoch*". Here Marx refers to those ideologues of history who understand history in respect of its superstructural or ideological determination. They make their understanding of a socio-historical formation dependent on its ideological form. They confer upon 'ideas' and 'conceptions' a determining agency and thus create and serve the illusion of an epoch.

(d) The above defect of the speculative and ideological view is indicative of a *defective method*. In his *capital* Marx says :

"It is, in practice, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, to infer from the actual relations of life at any period the corresponding 'spiritualized' forms of those relations. But the latter method is the only materialistic and therefore the only scientific one".

The speculative or ideological method is a method of interpretation of the structure by the super-structure. The materialistic or scientific method is a method of interpretation of the super-structure by the structure. The implications of this particular view of Marx

have been made the subject of hot debates by social scientists and philosophers. Attempt has been made to underline the deterministic consequence, both economic and technological, of this method of approach towards history. Scholars sympathetic to Marx are trying endlessly to exonerate him of the charge of determinism. Without entering into the manysided aspects of the debate, it can be said that the danger involved in an a-historical superstructural approach is far more alarming than the one adopted and practised by Marx.

( D )

A contemporary philosophic mind may get bewildered at the thought of the identification of the method of materialism and the method of science. To overcome this bewilderment one will have to place oneself at the standpoint of Marx's philosophical anthropology. Marx believes that the pre-history of mankind will come to an end only when the science of man and natural science subsume each other. Mankind must trod over a long tortuous path before human history becomes a natural history and natural history becomes human history. The end of the pre-history of mankind will mark the beginning of a unified science. In his EPM Marx expresses himself admirably thus :

"History itself is a real part of *natural history* and of *nature's becoming man*. Natural science will in time subsume the science of man just as the science of man will subsume natural science, there will be *one science*". (Italics mine)

But how does nature become man ? It becomes man, a part and parcel of human history, in and through the process of the creation of human society. Marx knew it that in class-divided society human labour was fundamentally an estranged labour. But he gave estranged labour its due honour. It is also a mode of activity that has its share in anthropologising nature. All such ideas are contained in the following passage of the EPM :

"Nature as it comes into being in human history—in the act of creation of human society — is the true nature of man ; hence nature as it comes into being, through industry, though in an estranged form, is true anthropological nature".

But nature's coming into man or man's coming into nature is not a spontaneous process. It is the direct result of social volition and effort to gain knowledge of nature and to attain mastery over it. The development of the varied types of instruments of production is an indication of the many-sided human efforts to materialize their powers of knowledge as well as to control practice in the interest of an on-going human life. In his *Grundrisse* Marx recognizes the power of 'the general intellect' or 'general social knowledge' in the moulding of nature and society. He considers such knowledge as itself a direct instrument of social practice and of real social life-process.

Marx's call for one unified science, one single basis for man and nature will require the maximum development of all the social forces of production, including man's intellect, social power of knowledge as well as the instruments of production. It is no wonder that Marx sets up a social goal of history, a social humanity in which man will come to exist as *a social being for himself*. Till now, man is a social being in himself, a being for *us* but in a future community he will be a being for himself. But when will man come to exist as a social being for himself? Marx answers :

"... it is only when man's object becomes a human object or objective man that man does not lose himself in that object. This is only possible when it becomes a social object for him and when he himself becomes a social being for himself, just as society becomes a being for him in this object".

Implied in this passage is the idea of a social object as the mirror image of a social being. A social object is not an object of private possession, not an object of private gratification and satisfaction for mere private use. As the mirror image or alter ego of society it is the confirmation of social life. So long as an object remains a private possession society is excluded from it. Marx's philosophical anthropology is committed to the goal of social humanity and the concepts of *social object* and *social being-for-himself* are its two essential ingredients.

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*Note :* This paper is based on a presentation of the theme in a seminar organised by R. K. Mission Vidyamandir Belur, to observe the death centenary of Karl Marx on 24. 3. 84.

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE STUDENTS TO THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY

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KRISHNA CHAKRABORTTY

There is a general feeling in India that the situation in higher education is unsatisfactory and even alarming in some ways, that the average standards have been falling and that a rapid expansion has taken place in lowering quality. The examination results, the reports of Public Service Commissions, the views of employers, the assessment of teachers themselves, the results of research—all seem to support this conclusion. What really matters is that over a large area of education, the content and quality are inadequate for the present and future requirements of the country.

If one goes through the deliberations and discussions in seminars, conferences, committees and commissions and findings of the researches dealing with crisis in higher education in India, one may identify some of its major causes. These are : (1) an extra-ordinary expansion amounting to an explosion of the population seeking higher education ; (2) inadequate facilities for teaching ; (3) poor student-teacher ratio and the lack of feed-back of competent teachers into the university system ; (4) excessive concentration of urban students in institutions for higher education ; (5) impersonalization of teaching and administration ; (6) alienation, frustration and cynicism among the participants of the education system ; (7) out-moded syllabus and teaching method which bear little connexion with the social reality ; (8) irregular and whimsical administrative mechanism ; and (9) intervention by the political parties. The combined effect of all these factors is a general and all-round fall in the standards of higher education.

In the present study<sup>1</sup> an attempt has been made to test the efficiency of the Calcutta University, the leading and the biggest

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university of West Bengal, in tackling these problems. The study has attempted to find out (a) how far the principle of 'selective admission' so widely circulated among the academicians and policy-makers is being followed in the field of higher education, and the desirability of implementing this principle; (b) how far the current education system offers opportunities to pupils from different segments of the society, or, to put it in a different way, whether it suffers from an 'elitist bias'; (c) what the students in the P. G. classes think about their future plan and what their aspirations are; and (d) what the students in the P. G. classes think about their teachers, union and university authority, administration and atmosphere.

For the lack of space, findings with regard to the last query only will be presented here. One must accept the rationale and relevance for collecting information regarding students' opinions and attitudes to the efficiency and effectiveness of the present system of university education—whether it caters or is capable of catering to the needs and expectations of the students. Their view should get a special weight and a patient hearing for they are the direct subject and the prime beneficiary of the system.

Data for the purpose have been collected from the students in the post-graduate class of the University of Calcutta in 1981-83 session. *Personal interview* with the help of a *semi-structured interview schedule* has been applied for collecting data. Samples for the study have been drawn from all the departments under four streams of study—Arts, Commerce and Business Management, Science and Agriculture, and Technology. The total enrolment in these departments is about 2100 (in the said session) of which 16% have been included in the sample. *Quota* sampling method has been applied for drawing samples. The quota for each department has been separately decided upon considering its student strength and the ratio of male and female students. Thus, the representation of each department and of male and female students has been ensured.

As appears from the reports of the respondents, only 18% of the students are satisfied whereas another 18% are only partly satisfied and 64% are not at all satisfied with the present system of education prevailing in the University. Respondents have not spared any party

concerned with the education system—the University authority, the Government, different political parties, the Students' Union, the teachers, the non-teaching staff and even their fellow students. Grievances, and complaints have been expressed against each of them. In their opinion, the total system and none of the parties singly is responsible for the present unhappy situation. However, as students are to interact with the teachers more directly, closely and frequently, they have raised the highest number of complaints against their teachers. In Table 1 the attitude of the students towards their teachers is being presented.

TABLE 1

Students, by their Attitude towards their Teachers (in percentage)

| Attitude to the<br>majority of the<br>teachers | good<br>% | so-so<br>% | not-so-<br>good<br>% | incapable<br>% | no<br>relation<br>% | Total<br>% | f   |
|--|-----------|------------|----------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|-----|
| As teachers                                    | 59        | 31         | 9                    | 1              | —                   | 100        | 340 |
| As persons                                     | 9         | 39         | 17                   | —              | 35                  | 100        | 340 |

It appears from Table 1 that the teaching capability of the majority of the teachers is 'good' according to the majority of the students, though no less than 10% of them have expressed a harsh opinion in this respect. On the contrary, the teacher-student relationship is not that satisfactory. For, a substantial section of the students (35%) have expressed the view that they do not have any relation whatsoever with their teachers outside the class-room and, therefore, have not found any occasion to form any idea about their personality. Only 9% of the students have stated that they have cordial / good relation with their teachers, whereas 17% have stated that their relation with their teachers is not satisfactory. One may draw, therefore, that there is a gap in the teacher-student relationship.

Students have illustrated their experiences too and the contents of these materials are being presented in Table 2. We must point out that this list is not exhaustive. The questions we put before the



respondents (Are you satisfied with your teachers ? If not, why ? ) were *open-ended*, and therefore, it might be quite probable that they simply forgot to mention many other charges besides those which they had mentioned. Quite naturally, it was not feasible for them to remember off-hand and provide a full list of all their inconveniences and grievances. They could only speak about the most formidable and pressing ones.

TABLE 2  
Complaints against Teachers

| <u>Complaints</u>   | <u>f</u> |
|---|----------|
| Teachers are not regular or punctual  | 116      |
| Teachers fail to make the class interesting / teaching is superficial, stereo-typed, sub-standard and dated | 163      |
| Teachers are not sincere or co-operative / there is a gap in the teacher-student relationship               | 94       |
| Teachers are incapable ( physically and / or academically )   | 20       |
| Teachers only dictate notes without subsequent discussion or explanation of the same                        | 29*      |
| Teachers do not cover the full syllabus and teach only the selected topics.                                 | 13**     |
| Teachers do not properly supervise practical classes or fieldwork   | 14***    |
| Teachers are too occupied with politics to give proper attention to the students                            | 17****   |
| Teachers are prejudiced and discriminating  | 8*****   |
| Teachers often keep scarce library books for an indefinite period.  | 5*****   |

Notes :

- \* None of the B. Tech. students has raised this charge.
- \*\* This charge has been raised only by Arts students.
- \*\*\* This charge has been raised only by B. Tech. and M. Sc. Students.
- \*\*\*\* This charge has been raised only by M. Com. and B. Tech. Students.
- \*\*\*\*\* This charge has been raised only by M. A. and M. Sc. Students.
- \*\*\*\*\* Only M. Sc. students have raised this charge.

TABLE 3

| Academic background<br>(% of marks obtained) | Attitude to teachers |            |                  |                | Total |     |
|--|----------------------|------------|------------------|----------------|-------|-----|
|  | good<br>%            | so-so<br>% | not-so-good<br>% | incapable<br>% | %     | f   |
| 40—44  | 81                   | 15         | 4                | —              | 100   | 27  |
| 45—49  | 59                   | 30         | 11               | —              | 100   | 66  |
| 50—54  | 59                   | 30         | 10               | 1              | 100   | 93  |
| 55—59  | 62                   | 31         | 7                | —              | 100   | 90  |
| 60—64  | 47                   | 40         | 13               | —              | 100   | 45  |
| 65+  | 47                   | 37         | —                | 16             | 100   | 19  |
| N =  | 202                  | 105        | 29               | 4              |       | 340 |

$X^2 = 54.13$  ;  $df = 15$  ; significant at .001 level ;

It has already been found that the student-teacher relationship ( measured on the basis of students' evaluation of the teacher as a 'person' apart from his teaching ability, frequency and occasion of contact with the teachers in and outside the class ) is not all happy in the University. It appears, then, that a substantial section of the students have reservations for most of their teachers, a respect for some well-equipped and sensitive ones, and a contempt for the few opportunist and badly prepared.

It appears from Table 2 that some students are aware that a few of their teachers play politics, are engaged in negotiation and manoeuvres, seek the advantages of influence. Respondents, however, have pointed out that they do not have any intention to say that their teachers do not know the subject matter of study or that they are under-qualified for their assigned duty. But, still many students feel that there is an intangible flaw in the academic person, a defect in his / her integrity, a failure in his / her leadership. They feel that academic work is not whole, that it is somehow biased. Sometimes students are not willing to trust their teachers on internal assessment. They apprehend that their instructors' judgement is not balanced or objective, not made according to professional criteria. Sometimes they fear that personal taste, prejudice, group loyalties, arbitrary likes and dislikes will affect teachers' decisions. They then want the protection of external examiners.

Students are most critical of the mode and content of teaching and the behaviour of teachers. Often they have commented : What is delivered in the class is not helpful for acquiring knowledge or a grasp of the subject. It is meant only for passing the examination. Teachers do not enter into the depth or root of the subject. Often they only dictate notes, which technique does not encourage students to develop a habit of original thinking. Nor can their lecture provide any useful guideline to the research-oriented students who have some originality and like to cultivate the same. Often teachers are the speakers and students are the silent listners. Often, particularly in large classes, teachers do not encourage students to ask questions or to initiate discussions on what they have delivered. This sort of behaviour and attitude on the part of the teacher make the class boring and uninteresting to the student. This is one of

the prime reasons why students make noise in the class or play truant.

Further, it has been alleged, teachers do not regularly take classes. To cover the syllabus, some of them take classes during vacations. Occasionally, they deliver lecture too speedily to follow. It appears that they neither dictate notes nor do they teach through discussion ; instead, they simply read out from the written notes or from books. This is not teaching at all, students opine. Sometimes it so happens that teachers take unnotified leave. As students are not earlier informed of their absence, they are to wait in the class and cannot attend the library. Lots of time are wasted in this manner.

This has also been cited that teachers are not sincere enough and they deliver lectures only mechanically and by rote and do not care whether students follow or not. They simply take it as a routine affair. There is no teaching and what is done is only delivering of lectures which, too, are not of a high quality. Thus, classes appear to the students as boring and not useful. In this connexion one may note what some respondents those who have come from famous colleges, have said. These respondents say that they find it useful and interesting to maintain contacts with their college teachers who provide them with many useful help, books and suggestions. But these students do not feel interest in approaching the teachers in the University. Students who have come from ordinary colleges or from suburban and rural areas complain that their training in the undergraduate level remains deficient and incomplete compared to that of those who have come from famous colleges. Occasionally teachers from these famous colleges teach in the University on a part-time basis. Thus, the students in these colleges get acquainted with the P. G. teaching even in their undergraduate level. Ordinary colleges, on the other hand, do not always complete the syllabus and their teaching is much below the standard. Students from these colleges have to face tremendous difficulty, particularly in the early days in the University, in coping with the students from the famous colleges. Students from these ordinary colleges who constitute a formidable majority of the University students, complain that the University does not care for them. They think that it can do

something for them so that they can cope with the rest. Teachers know that they are weak, that they fail to follow their lecture ; yet they ignore their difficulty while they deliver lecture.

Students have expressed an utter dissatisfaction with the university administration too, as appears from Table 4. They say, it is not efficient enough to control the teaching and the non-teaching staff or the students. It behaves sometimes too leniently and occasionally too rigidly. As a result, the state of discipline prevailing in the University is poor. Examinations are not held regularly, nor do the results come out in time, and students are the worst sufferers for these anomalies. Some students have complained that the non-teaching staff do not co-operate with them. This has been also claimed by a good many students that the authority must keep a vigil over the teachers so that they regularly take class and complete the full syllabus in time. It has been mentioned by some respondents that classes are occasionally suspended on insignificant grounds and without previous notice. This is disadvantageous to students and particularly to those who come from a distance.

Respondents have alleged that sometimes the administration becomes unduly influenced by political parties. They assert that students who do not like to be 'committed' to a particular party ( students' wing of a political party ) cannot find accommodation in the students' hostels. Further, it has been pointed out, student leaders do not generally come to the class but they do not face any difficulty in maintaining or 'managing' the required quota of percentage. These student leaders, it has been alleged, can shift the scheduled data of the commencement of examinations to the detriment of the interest of the ordinary students. Often they join the processions, shout slogans, call strike on issues which are not related to the interest of the student community, and, what is most objectionable, they insist others on joining with them. Sometimes it is found that examinations are going on and these people are shouting slogans through loud-speakers within the University campus. Workers of the student wings of different political parties are responsible to a great extent for making the walls of the University unclean. One respondent has very sensibly commented, the fact that the leadership of the Students' Union changes with the coming of a new political

TABLE 4

## Complaints against University Authority and System of Education

| <u>Complaints</u>   | <u>f</u> |
|---|----------|
| Authority is too lenient / unnecessarily rigid  | 245      |
| Non-teaching staff is not co-operative  | 13       |
| Library facilities are insufficient   | 147      |
| Laboratory equipment and apparatus are inadequate and dated   | 30*      |
| Syllabus is dated and not practice-oriented   | 81       |
| The examination system is defective   | 91       |
| There are too many students in a section  | 59**     |
| There is too much interference by political parties   | 124      |
| Atmosphere is too noisy   | 57***    |
| There is a paucity of experienced teachers ; adequate number of guest lecturers are not brought from the industry | 12****   |

*Note :* \* This charge has been raised only by M. Sc. and B. Tech. students.

\*\* None of the B. Tech. students has raised this charge.

\*\*\* Students in the College Street campus only have raised this charge.

\*\*\*\* Only B. Tech. and M. B. M. students have raised this charge.

party in the seat of the Government, indicates that the Students' Union is controlled by the ruling political party.

The respondents desire some stern action on the part of the University authority to prevent all these 'nuisances'. Some respondents are so much annoyed with their activities that they opine that to maintain a calm, quiet, peaceful and academic atmosphere in the University, the entrance of all political parties into the campus should be strictly banned.

Lots of grievances have been expressed against the library and laboratory systems, system of examination, content of the syllabus and the medium of instruction. The library and laboratory systems have been said to be too inadequate to meet the needs of students.

Both financial inadequacy and behaviour of the staff have been said to be responsible for this.

Respondents have viewed that the present system of examination fails to measure the merit and sincerity of examinees and what is tested is the skill of memorizing and guessing questions. It is not merit or sincerity but luck which helps to secure good marks. Those students who can successfully guess questions and who prepare only a limited number of topics, can secure high marks, whereas those who try to go into the whole syllabus, are put into difficulty. For, the syllabus is too vast to be covered by one, and thus students are forced and even 'encouraged' to be selective and acquire only a cursory and superficial knowledge in the subject.

It seems that almost no student is happy with his/her syllabus. Complaints against the syllabus are of different sorts. In the opinion of the majority of the students, syllabus is not real-life oriented and puts too much stress on the acquiring of theoretical knowledge. It is dated and does not include the modern developments. This deficient syllabus along with the stereotyped, insincere and substandard mode of teaching prevents the students from acquiring an effective knowledge—knowledge that can help either in knowing a subject well or can be applied as a 'means' in the job market.

In the opinion of some other students, the syllabus is vast, heavy and not-balanced. Sometimes it unnecessarily repeats what has already been covered in the undergraduate course, sometimes there is a sudden jump from the undergraduate course to the P. G. course. Because of the vastness of the syllabus, students are compelled to become selective and superficial. Respondents have added, every year only a limited and selected number of topics are taught, while a facade of a wide curriculum and a formidable array of text-books are kept. This system can work as often teachers themselves are the paper-setters and examiners. Actually what the teacher decides, becomes the syllabus for that year. This system enables the teachers to surreptitiously delimit the syllabus. It has become a convention not to repeat the topics on which questions were set in the preceding year. From the very beginning of the session, teachers avoid discussion on those topics. Thus, students get the degree, sometimes high marks, but their knowledge in the subject remains superficial and incomplete.

When they become teachers (as usually occurs), one can only imagine the results. Even if some good teachers are there, they cannot stick to the standard because the prevailing environment does not permit them to do so ; or otherwise, they will have to risk their popularity, even sometimes their job.

Students have objected to the medium of instruction used by some teachers. It has been said that teachers do not deliver lecture either in pure English or in pure Bengali. Instead, they use a 'mixed' language. Students claim that only one language, i.e., either English or Bengali, should be uniformly used as the medium. Moreover, a substantial section of the students have objected to the use of English as the medium of instruction in the P. G. level. They say that they have been taught in Bengali in the undergraduate stage; it, therefore, becomes difficult for them to get themselves prepared in English at the P. G. level. Under the present arrangement, they have to divert, or at least to divide, their attention from the learning of their subject to learning the English Language. These students claim that there must be a parity in the undergraduate and post-graduate stages so far as the medium of instruction is concerned.

Nor are the students oblivious to the misconduct of some of their fellows. In the opinion of about one-fourth of the students, students' behaviour is irresponsible and sometimes indecent. They say, a good number of students come here for various purposes other than academic. These students spoil the academic atmosphere of the University in a number of ways. They make noise in and outside the class-room even when classes go on. Sometimes they ask silly questions which make them appear as fools. Sometimes they pass indecent remarks regarding the teachers and do not show any mark of respect towards the teachers. Such trouble-makers are not many in number but their strength is sufficient enough to corrupt the atmosphere. What is more serious, they impair the teacher-student relationship. Getting disturbed with their behaviour, teachers become irritated and ultimately disgusted with the whole class. Gradually they withdraw themselves from the students. Thus, teachers' behaviour turns out to be cold, indifferent and insincere, and the whole of the student community has to suffer for a handful of the students.



The above pages make it clear that the present University education system fails to satisfy the students. Reasons for students' dissatisfaction are many and multi-dimensional. These things have led to the development of a vicious cycle where inefficiency, frustration and a sort of goallessness have come to stay. Quite contrary to the popular conception, this study reveals that majority of the students like ( so far as the verbal expression of their opinion discloses ) to study seriously and are against any attempt to dilute the standard of teaching. That is why they have raised their voice against all the parties, including some of their class friends who want to create troubles and lower the academic standard of the University. They say, they want to learn something and apply the same for the welfare of the society and for their own good as well. Definitely, they have not come here to acquire knowledge for self-purification. Instead, they desire to use it as a means, and to them there is nothing wrong in it nor does the value of education wane for this. They feel that the present examination-centred system of education which has transformed the University ( and any institution of education for that matter ) into a form of degree-manufacturing body, fulfils neither of these goals.

Going through the complaints of the students, one may form an impression that the University has probably been displaced from its original goal, or, the goal has become secondary to the means. The problem is, however, not peculiar to the University of Calcutta, as it appears from reports or from the deliberations of the seminars on higher education. This, however, becomes apparent from this study that this University falls within the all-India pattern, and that it does not offer any alternative to the prevailing morass.

The problems of the University are multi-faced and some of them are actually problems of the wider society, for the solution of which the University can do very little. Yet, something can definitely be done even though resources and capacities are limited. Within its limited capacities, the University can take up some measures to redress students' inconveniences with regard to the syllabus, system of examination, medium of instruction and development of the library and laboratory systems. Besides, several steps can be taken to improve the mode and content of teaching and the teacher-student relationship.

The improvement and reform of the mode and content of teaching and of the technique of evaluation of students' performance are, in fact, urgent needs. The existing conditions in this regard are extremely unhappy. Most of the teaching is being dominated by a syllabus which is out-of-date by many years. As the performance of students is assessed by the final examination based on this syllabus, an undue emphasis is laid on unintelligent and selective cramming. Everything becomes examination-centred and occurs mechanically.

A university has to face another special problem too unlike the undergraduate colleges. A university is a place where students from different colleges having different standards and training ( high and low ) assemble. It is just like a sea where different streams meet together. Quite naturally, both teachers and students face difficulty in interacting with each other in such conditions. If the teacher aims at satisfying students with a stronger academic base, students having a poor background fail to follow him. Paradoxically, if he aims at satisfying students in the latter group, his class seems to be uninteresting, boring and his teaching appears superficial and sometimes sub-standard to the students in the former group. Thus, it becomes almost impossible for the teacher to simultaneously satisfy all the students in the class and yet stick to an optimum standard of teaching. Teachers in the under-graduate colleges generally do not have to face this problem since their students are more or less homogeneous.

The heterogeneous composition of the students along with the large size of the class are some of the major factors which inhibit the creation of an ideal condition of learning. These conditions increase the dependence on formal instruction and do not allow an increase in the number of tutorial classes, discussion groups, seminars which are essential for bringing about a change in the content and mode of teaching, for discouragement of cramming and for stimulation of curiosity, problem-solving capacity and originality. These, tutorial classes are to be arranged specially for the students having a poor background and weak base so that they can catch up the standard of the P. G. class. This measure could probably mitigate the apparent conflict between quality and equality.

With improvement in teaching, some other measures are to be simultaneously taken with respect to the system of examination and the content of the syllabus. Under the present system, when the marks obtained in the examination ( held at the end of the year / session ) are regarded as the sole determinant of success and the future of the students is totally decided by these marks, students pay minimum attention to learning, do little independent study throughout most of the academic year and cram desperately for the final examination. As there are set syllabuses and question-types, students can afford to be selective. Through the introduction of more frequent and periodical tests, this undue emphasis on the final examination and the practice of guessing questions could be reduced.

Next, a firm, uniform and proper decision with regard to the medium of instruction is an urgent necessity. Clearly, the problems of teaching and of the examination system in higher education are inextricably linked with the medium of instruction and examination. The present policy on this issue is utterly ambivalent and ambiguous. At the primary level the medium of instruction is the mother tongue. At the secondary level English is introduced as a second language, though the stage at which English should be taught is causing sharp controversies. At the undergraduate level, there is no fixed decision with regard to the medium of instruction. Some colleges ( specially in the sub-urban areas and where students with low academic capacity read ) stick to Bengali ( the mother tongue of the majority in West Bengal ) whereas the 'elite' colleges follow English. Students from both these groups meet in the University. Students who had their training in Bengali fail to follow the lecture if it is given in English. On the other hand, teachers in the University who are trained and habituated to the use of English, have a definite interest in its retention. If they have to teach in Bengali, they will have to remake all of their lectures, rework their thoughts and revise the style of communication. Therefore, they are convinced that academic standards are lowered by a change for which the teachers could hardly get themselves prepared. They point out many dangers in doing so : absence of good text books, inadequacy of vocabulary, unsuitability of concepts, underdevelopment of the regional language as a tool of higher learning, etc. As the teachers, experts and the specialists do not show much interest in writing good text books in the regional language, the

standard of these books is very low. The bright and intelligent students normally prefer the texts in English since they find vernacular books sub-standard. Also, for their future prospect they need to master English, as English is still the medium of transaction of political, administrative, legal and economic processes in our country and a knowledge of English is regarded as an effective passport to all lucrative and key positions in this society.

Now, the problem of the teachers is to simultaneously satisfy both these groups with conflicting needs, aspirations and preparations. As a result, most of them communicate in a language which is no better than an atrocious congeries of English and the vernacular language.

These anomalies prevail because of the governmental policy which recognises the primacy of the regional language in theory but in actual practice allows both English and the regional language to continue side by side. As a result of this ambivalent language policy on the part of the University and the Government, and the intrusion of popular, political and patriotic controversies into purely academic questions, neither of these languages is properly cultivated. We are yet to realize that the undergraduate and post-graduate levels of education are integrally linked and that a university cannot and should not have one medium of education at the undergraduate level and another (which is a foreign language) at the post-graduate level. It is just a matter of plain commonsense to understand that a one and uniform medium of education should be used at the undergraduate, particularly in the Honours classes, and the post-graduate levels.

Lastly, it need not be said that it is in the class-room that the real work of a university takes place. At the highest level, the policy-making mechanism is not as crucial as the imagination and the dedication of the teacher and the enthusiasm and the effort of the student. Already we have seen that the clientele of the University is not so much constituted by the young men of the wealthy and the well-placed families as by the members of the less well-off classes. Barring a few exceptions of the seekers of knowledge, most of the expectant young people belonging to the wealthy and advanced (?)

families are moved into other pursuits. For the vast majority of the University students university education and life mean a frayed but desirable status which provide vigour and vitality. Their manner is less polished, their values are less worldly and their motives are calculated. People in this group are not susceptible to the older traditions, nor are they prone to the older moralisms of knowledge. They chatter outside the classes, come late and leave early, whisper openly during lectures, manifestly express signs of getting bored, make remarks which embarrass themselves and others. May be, they have not been trained in the proper academic manners. This ignorance about procedures is true even in their more serious offences such as the tearing off the important pages from the library books. They mean no harm or dishonesty by this. They have never been instructed in the methods of study, of analysis, of thought, of writing. Even there grossest negligence in the academic field is due to their inadvertence or ignorance.

Quite naturally, the attitude of the teachers to such students cannot be congenial, and this unfavourable attitude is expressed in the following sorts of behaviour : the refusal to respond sympathetically to questions asked by students in the class, the posture of superiority, the pompous assumption that he is in control of both the subject matter and the mind of the students, the compulsion to maintain authority in everything, the reluctance to admit errors and misjudgements, the lack of serious effort. The teacher spends his leisure hours with his/her colleagues in the teachers' room where students cannot stay unless they have some specific piece of business. There is not a place, nor an occasion, nor a real desire on the part of the teachers and the students to meet together for the sympathetic exchange of ideas which does not take place in the class-room. This isolation exists by common consent, though both of the parties feel the gap in the relationship and regard the same as unfortunate. Yet, everything in physical arrangement, mental set, course work, function, situation had led to the present condition which makes students utterly unhappy. Respondents have often stressed the need for holding cultural programmes, seminars and for going out on excursions with teachers in the hope that through these programmes they would find some occasions to closely interact with the teachers, which may reduce the gap in their relationship with the latter.

Anyway, this researcher feels that the present teacher-student relationship which is characterised by an amorphous mixture of reticence, hierarchy, diffidence, suspicion, authority, formality, shyness, convention, distance, silence, neglect, and a lack of affection, regard and confidence, must be altered, and it is the teachers who are to take initiative in this respect.

#### **Note**

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## RAJKRISHNA MUKHERJEE : A FORGOTTEN PIONEER OF SOCIOLOGY IN INDIA

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DEB KUMAR BANERJEE

Sociology as a modern social science originated in the nineteenth century in Europe, though many of the ideas and concepts which went into its making emanated from the writings of many thinkers in the preceding centuries, and some of these ingredients could be traced to the hoary past. The name 'sociology' was given to this social science by the nineteenth century French thinker Auguste Comte and he is also generally regarded as the foremost among the founders of this discipline. Comte's ideas influenced not only social thought in Europe in his day ; these ideas attracted the attention of some Indian thinkers of the nineteenth century as well. One of them was Rajkrishna Mukherjee of Bengal, one of the early propagators of Comtean ideas in our country, one of the pioneers of sociology in India.

Rajkrishna was born on 31st October, 1845, and he passed away on 10th October, 1886. He, thus, lived for a brief span of fortyone years only. Within this short span of his life, he made immensely valuable contributions to a number of fields of knowledge which included such diverse subjects as poetry, philosophy, sociology, history and algebra. He knew a number of languages such as Persian, Urdu, Oriya, Sanskrit, English, German, French, Latin and Pali, apart from Bengali which was his mother tongue and in which he achieved fame as a forceful prose writer and a talented poet. An M.A. in Philosophy and a Bachelor of Law, Rajkrishna was well-equipped both for the teaching and the legal profession. And, in fact, after legal practice for sometime, he took to the teaching profession and taught in several institutions like Patna College,

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Berhampore College, General Assembly's Institution and Presidency College. The subjects he taught were English literature, philosophy and history. Though basically a man of humanities, Rajkrishna was also keenly interested in science, and he was actively associated with 'The Indian Association For the Cultivation of Science' which was established by Mahendralal Sarkar in 1876.<sup>1</sup>

Rajkrishna published nine books in Bengali. The first was an allegorical poem entitled *Jaubonodyan* (the garden of youth), 1868. Then followed two other poetry books—*Mitrabilap* *Ô Onyanya Kabitabali*, 1869, and *Kabyakalap*, 1870. In 1870, he also published *Rajbala*, an historical narrative, which was his first work in prose. In 1872, he wrote a book on algebra, *Pratham Siksha Bijganit*, a book that was praised by Haraprasad Shastri as a standard work on the subject. The next Bengali book from his pen was a book on history in 1874, namely, *Pratham Siksha Banglar Itihas*. While reviewing this book in *Bangadarshan*, Bankim Chandra observed that it was not a mere list of names of kings or a list of wars, it was truly social history. Rajkrishna published another book of poems, *Kabitamala*, in 1877. This was followed by a Bengali translation of *Meghdoot* in verse in 1882. And, finally, in 1885 he published *Nana Prabandha* (Diverse Essays) which contained his sociological essays. These essays had been previously published in *Bangadarshan*. Rajkrishna published five books in English, namely, *Hindu Philosophy*, 1869, *A Lecture On Hindu Philosophy*, 1870, *Hindu Mythology*, 1870, *The Theory of Morals and Origin of Language* and *Hints to the Study of the Bengali Language, for the Use of European and Bengali Students*, 1883. These books in English incorporated lectures delivered by Rajkrishna in different learned societies such as the Bethune Society, Cuttack Young Men's Literary Association, etc.

The width of Rajkrishna's interests appears to us to be astounding. But interest in a wide range of subjects was not uncommon in Rajkrishna's milieu. Narrow specialisation is a product of our century, or rather the second half of our century. To one who goes in for physics today ignorance of chemistry is regarded as excusable, indifference to social science is supposed to be permissible; and apathy to literature is taken to be quite natural. It was not so in Rajkrishna's day. To him, and to most other outstanding scholars



of his times, different branches of knowledge and culture were so dovetailed that an educated man should find no difficulty in and no inhibition against moving freely from one field of scholarship to another. There was nothing unnatural, therefore, for Rajkrishna to be at the same time a man of literature and a social scientist, a philosopher and an historian, a linguist and a mathematician. But if we mark the progress of his career as an author, we will notice that though he had varied interests, he became particularly interested in sociology during the fag end of his brief life. Poetry was, of course, his first love, and he never lost his interest in poetry. His incursions into the domains of mathematics and history were clearly pedagogic in motivation. His discourses on Hindu philosophy were in tune with his academic orientation. But how are we to explain the shifting of his interest to sociology? To my mind, three factors possibly contributed towards this shift of his interest. Firstly, as early sociology had its moorings in philosophy, his philosophical orientation paved the path for his social enquiries. Secondly, as sociology was, and is, the application of science to the study of society, his interest in and association with 'The Association For The Cultivation of Science' from 1876 onwards naturally kindled his interest in viewing society scientifically. Thirdly, Comtean ideas had become a part of the intellectual climate in Bengal in the seventies of the nineteenth century and Rajkrishna as an intellectual could hardly remain unaffected by them.<sup>3</sup>

Rajkrishna's *Nana Prabandha* includes fourteen essays, seven of which are distinctly sociological. *Bhashar Utpatti* (Origin of Language), *Prativa* (Genius), *Comte Darshan* (Philosophy of Comte), *Sabhyata* (Civilisation), *Samaj Bijnan* (Social Science), *Manushya O Bahya Jagat* (Man and the External World), and *Jnan O Niti* (Knowledge and Ethics) belong to this category. The rest of the essays are literary, philosophic and historical. The brilliance displayed by Rajkrishna in analysing social facts and in examining social theories in his *Nana Prabandha* makes it abundantly clear that he had the potentiality of becoming a great sociologist, and he certainly would have immensely enriched social scientific thought in Bengal if death had not cut short his life just one year after the publication of this book.

In the essay, *Bhashar Utpatti*, Rajkrishna examines three views about the origin of language. The first view is that language is given by God and not created by men. He criticises this view by pointing out that languages have developed by coining new words to express new ideas and by using old words in new senses. And the expressive power of language has been increased by men themselves. So it is unhistorical to say that language was given to men by God. It is, of course, true, Rajkrishna concedes, that God has given us certain powers and certain materials. We transform these materials with our powers to create all that we need. We build houses, for example, with God-given raw materials such as stone, earth, etc, but nobody would suggest that God created the buildings and not men. Similarly, our ability to utter certain sounds and to give specific meanings to them may not be our creation, but why should that be any reason for calling language, which we have created by using our natural ability, as God-given? The second theory holds that language evolved in the remote past out of agreement among people about which word was to be used to mean which thing. This is also, according to Rajkrishna, unhistorical. And that apart, how could people, in the absence of language, communicate their ideas with each other about such nomenclature of various objects? The third view suggests that language evolved by imitating the sounds of various natural phenomena. Thus men are supposed to have imitated the murmur of rivers, the chirping of birds, and so on. It should be remembered, however, Rajkrishna points out, that there are so many words in Sanskrit, English, and other developed languages which are not onomatopoeic. For example, a cat is called a cat and not a miao. Rajkrishna brings this interesting socio-linguistic discussion to a conclusion by opining that these three views about the origin of language correspond to and vindicate Comte's three stages of development of knowledge. "ভাষার উৎপত্তি সম্বন্ধে যে তিনটি মতের উল্লেখ করা গিয়াছে, তাহাতে কোম্বের বাক্যের পোষকতা হইতেছে। ঈশ্বর মনুষ্যকে ভাষা দিয়াছেন; ঐতিহাসিক-প্রমাণ-শূন্য বর্তমান-ব্যবস্থার বিরুদ্ধে লৌকিক সম্মতি হইতে ভাষা জন্মিয়াছে, এক্ষণে মনুষ্যের যে শব্দানুকরণশক্তি দৃষ্ট হইতেছে, সেই শক্তি প্রভাবেই ভাষার উৎপত্তি হইয়াছে, এই তিনটি মত জ্ঞানোন্নতি সংক্রান্ত তিনটি অবস্থার সাক্ষ্য-প্রদান করিতেছে।"<sup>8</sup>

In *Prativa* Rajkrishna explores the content of genius and brings into his discussion the now familiar heredity versus environment controversy. According to him, genius is and is not inborn. It is

undeniable that some are born with that extra-ordinary creative power which we call genius. By practising something one can, of course, become an expert in that. Thus, one can practise verse-writing and become an expert in writing verses. But everyone can not become a Balmiki or a Kalidas. At the same time, Rajkrishna argues, we must not forget that without cultivation of their literary faculties, without learning the art of poetry through study, the great poets could not become what they were capable of becoming. Thus, genius, in his view, depends on both nature and nurture. “যিনি যে প্রকার শক্তি লইয়া জন্মগ্রহণ করুন না কেন, উপযোগী অবস্থায় পতিত না হইলে তাহার প্রতিভা বিকশিত হইতে পারে না। একটি সতেজ বৃক্ষও ছায়ায় প্রোথিত করিলে, তাহা সূর্যকিরণাভাবে হতশ্রী ও নিস্তেজ হইয়া যায়।.....প্রতিভার বিকাশের নিমিত্ত অনুকূল শিক্ষার প্রয়োজন।”<sup>4</sup>

Rajkrishna presents a lucid exposition of Comte's philosophy, alongwith his comments on it, in the essay entitled *Comte Darshan*. Here he explains Comte's three stages, that is, the historical sequence of the three ways of interpreting natural phenomena, namely, religious, metaphysical and positive. Rajkrishna points out that before Comte, Hume and Turgot had already presented the idea that there are different ways of interpreting natural phenomena. Comte was, however, the first to formulate this idea in a schematic form and to apply it as an aid to social exegesis. From the way Rajkrishna writes about Comte, it is quite obvious that he was profoundly influenced by Comte and had accepted Comte's positive philosophy as an advancement on all that preceded it. But he was not uncritical in his attitude towards Comte. His criticism of Comte for not including psychology in his list of abstract of general sciences. In his view, Comte should have placed psychology before sociology, instead of placing sociology immediately after biology, because the human mind is the heart of society and as such without a scientific theory about the human mind, the basis for sociology cannot be laid. “কেবল কতকগুলি শরীরীর সংযোগে সমাজ সংগঠিত হয় না। কাননে অসংখ্য তরুলতা একত্রে আছে ; কিন্তু সেখানে আমরা সমাজের অস্তিত্ব স্বীকার করি না। যেখানে আমরা মনের সহিত মনের ঘাতপ্রতিঘাত উপলব্ধি করি, যেখানে অনেকের মন একত্রিত হইয়া কার্যে প্রবৃত্ত দেখি, সেখানেই কেবল আমরা সমাজ বলিয়া থাকি। অতএব যে মন সমাজের মূল স্বরূপ, তাৎক্ষণিক বৈজ্ঞানিক তত্ত্ব সংগ্রহ না হইলে সমাজতত্ত্বের ভিত্তি-নির্মাণই হয় না। সুতরাং সমাজতত্ত্বের পূর্বে মনস্তত্ত্ব সন্নিবেশ করা চাই।”<sup>5</sup> Rajkrishna clearly wanted sociology to be based on a firm psychological foundation.

In *Sabhyata* Rajkrishna examines the nature of human civilisation and opines that a civilised society is distinguished from an uncivilised one by a greater social sense. This social sense, in its turn, implies the existence of a unifying controlling force in society, an extensive division of labour, a common language for the communication of ideas, an attitude of forgiveness and kindness to each other, and a sense of unity that binds the members of a society together. The possession of these ingredients in a greater measure makes a society advance in civilisation. But, according to Rajkrishna, civilisation does not merely refer to social, including political, economic and religious, development ; it certainly involves advancement of knowledge also, because, after all, it is knowledge that makes men greatest among creatures. It is by using their knowledge that men succeed in controlling the forces of nature and thereby advance in the scale of civilisation. In the beginning, men were everywhere uncivilised. From that state, different nations have become civilised to different extents. It is true, Rajkrishna concedes, that sometimes a nation reverts back to a more backward state instead of advancing to a higher level of civilisation. But, on the whole, the march of civilisation goes on, one nation taking the torch of progress from the faltering hands of another. “জাতিবিশেষের উদয়াস্ত আছে, কিন্তু এক জাতির হস্ত হইতে অপর জাতি উন্নতি নিশান গ্রহণ করিয়া নেতৃত্বে অগ্রসর হয়।”<sup>6</sup>

Rajkrishna acquaints us with the nature of sociology in the essay entitled *Samaj Bijnan*. In this illuminating essay, he contends that the extension of the domain of science is the basic characteristic of the present day world. Science discovers everywhere the operation of natural forces, and concentrates on finding out the cause and effect relationships in every phenomenon. From the study of nature, it has now extended its domain to human society. Science is demonstrating that social phenomena are law-governed just as natural phenomena are so. “মানবজাতিও কার্যকারণ শৃঙ্খলে গ্রথিত, মানবজাতিও নিয়মের অধীন।”<sup>7</sup> Some may object to such a view, Rajkrishna tells us, on the ground that being governed by any social laws in our actions would be contrary to our belief that we are free to act anyway we like. It may be argued that we repent after having done something immoral only because we feel that we could have refrained from doing it if we so wanted, or, in other words, we were free to act or

not to act in the way we did. Otherwise, if we were not free to choose our course of action, such repentance would be meaningless. Rajkrishna answers this objection by pointing out that there is no real contradiction between being free to act and our actions being law-governed. In a sense, we are free, because otherwise we will not sometimes repent for our actions. But we indulged in such acts because our passions or the prevailing circumstances compelled us to act that way. By censure or praise, punishment or reward, men may be refrained from doing certain things and encouraged to do certain other things. Here, clearly, the censure, praise, etc act as causes tending to produce the desired social effects. As a matter of fact, Rajkrishna points out, from the data collected in Europe and America on various social phenomena, fairly accurate predictions can be made about how people will act in spheres of social life in which men are traditionally believed to be free to act, such as how many people will marry in a year, how many people will be murdered in a year, and so on. As long as the social condition remains unchanged, these figures will also broadly remain unchanged. All these, according to Rajkrishna, illustrate that human society is governed by some laws and that all social happenings have their causes. It should not, however, be thought that science can predict every future act of an individual. Accurate prediction is not possible in every case even in such a science as astronomy, and it is easily understandable how much more difficult it will be for social science which deals with diverse types of men under diverse circumstances to make accurate predictions. “.....বহুবিধ বাসনাজড়িত বহুসংখ্যক ব্যক্তিবর্গের গতি স্থির করা সহজ কাণ্ড নহে। বিশেষতঃ দেশ, কাল ও অবস্থাভেদে মানুষের প্রকৃতিভেদ দৃষ্ট হয়।”<sup>১৪</sup> Rajkrishna tells us that following the division of mechanics into statics and dynamics, sociologists have divided sociology into social statics and social dynamics. The first studies society as it is at any moment, and the second studies society in course of change. The reference is obviously to Comte's division of sociology into two such parts. In another obvious reference to Comte and Spencer, Rajkrishna says that writers have compared human society with a living organism. Just as the nervous system links up different organs of living body, similarly the rulers maintain the unity of different parts of society. Further, as different organs of the body perform different functions necessary for the wellbeing of the body,

similarly different classes of persons are necessary for the wellbeing of society. These and other similarities between an organism and society, Rajkrishna points out, should not, however, make us oblivious of significant differences between them. Every individual constituent of society is a conscious being, but every organ of a living being does not have consciousness. As the constituents of society are conscious beings, and the constituents of a living body are not so, it follows that knowledge and will play a much more important role in the functioning of society than that of a living organism. Rajkrishna contends that social progress is of three types—development of knowledge, development of morality, and increase of man's control over the external world. As the second and the third types are dependent on the first, the law governing the development of human knowledge is the main law of social progress. In this connection, Rajkrishna mentions Comte's law of three stages—religious, metaphysical and positive—and also the Comtean contention that the simpler a subject, the quicker does it reach the scientific stage. In Rajkrishna's opinion, no one had till then been able to improve upon these views of Comte.

The essay *Manushya O Bahyajagat* is devoted to an examination of the influence of geography, that is, of climate, altitude, soil, etc., on social life. Rajkrishna shows that a cold climate makes people more industrious. For example, in colder Europe people are more industrious than in hotter Asia. Again, unlike people in colder regions, people in hotter regions are usually vegetarian, as in Egypt. Rajkrishna tells us that in regions where like Egypt food grains can be easily grown due to a fertile soil and much clothing is not required due to a hot climate, people have less economic worries. So, in such regions, the working people do not hesitate to marry and to beget many children. The result is a rapid increase in the number of working people. And this, in its turn, lowers the wage of workers, while the rich people grow richer by exploiting the workers. The rich people thus become more and more powerful, and become the highest caste or class in society. The Brahmin and Kshatriya castes in India, according to Rajkrishna, arose in this way. He also dwells upon the influence of rivers, hills, forests, etc., on trade, occupation, culture, and so on. Notwithstanding the influence of the physical surroundings, however, it will be wrong to suppose that social life

is exclusively determined by geographical factors. Rajkrishna thinks that much depends on the intrinsic qualities of a race. “কেহই যেন মনে না করেন যে, কেবল বৈদেশিক সংস্থান দ্বারা, কেবল চতুঃপার্শ্ববর্তী বহিঃপদার্থ দ্বারা ইতিহাসের ঘটনামালার ব্যাখ্যা করা যায়। প্রত্যেক জাতির অন্তর্নিহিত শক্তি এখানে গণনীয়।”<sup>১০</sup> That apart, whatever might have been true in the past, according to Rajkrishna, with the advancement of civilisation, the influence of nature on social life is decreasing, while the influence of knowledge on social life is increasing. “প্রাচীন কালে যাহা হইয়া থাকুক, সভ্যতাবৃদ্ধির সঙ্গে সঙ্গে যে বাহ্যজগতের ক্ষমতা কমিয়া যাইতেছে এবং মনুষ্যের প্রভাব বাড়িতেছে এ বিষয়ে সন্দেহ নাই। বর্তমান কালে দেশের অবস্থা অপেক্ষা অধিবাসীদিগের জ্ঞানবৃদ্ধির উপর সভ্যতা বৃদ্ধি নির্ভর করিতেছে।”<sup>১১</sup>

It *Jnan O Niti*, Rajkrishna examines the relation between knowledge and ethics. He tries to establish, with copious examples from anthropological literature, that contrary to the view expressed by some writers, not only has knowledge advanced with the passage of time, human ethics has also progressed a lot. Those who think that ethics has not progressed, argue that vices like addiction to wine, hankering after wealth, craving for sensual pleasure, selfishness, etc, have not decreased with civilisation, and so it is not possible to claim that civilised people are ethically superior to their uncivilised ancestors. Besides that, if morality had progressed, some new canons of morality would have been added to the old canons of morality. But that is not the case. Taking illustrations from both epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana as well as from anthropological, sociological and historical studies by a number of writers like Lubbock, Buchner, Comte, Spencer, Burton, etc, Rajkrishna shows that among uncivilised, primitive men cannibalism, sexual promiscuity, and the like were quite common, whereas these have ceased with the advance of civilisation. Hence he holds that men have ethically progressed a lot as far as social practices are concerned. He also contends that it is not true either that no new ethical ideas have been added to the ethical ideas of the past. As an example of this, Rajkrishna cites the changing attitude to slavery. Slavery is universally condemned today, but nowhere in the ancient world was it considered to be an unethical practice.

Rajkrishna Mukherjee's sociological essays in *Nana Prabandha* are written in excellent Bengali prose. And when we are trying

today to make Bengali the medium of instruction in all stages of education in West Bengal and to promote translatory work and original writings in social sciences in Bengali language, Rajkrishna's essays could easily provide us with a model worth emulating. It may be contended, of course, that his essays aim at a lucid exposition of some social themes, in the light of western social scientific theories, rather than the presentation of any truly original ideas on them. Rajkrishna contributed to the development of sociology in India more as a propagator than as an innovator of sociological ideas. He was, however, not the first among Bengali intellectuals to propagate these ideas. Thanks to the efforts of the Bethune Society and the Bengal Social Science Association, the ideas of Comte, Spencer, Mill, etc., had already started permeating the thought of the Bengali intelligentsia.<sup>11</sup> And many eminent men from Rammohan Roy to Bhudeb Mukherjee had fertilised the imagination of the educated Bengalees of that generation with social scientific thought. Rajkrishna imbibed the scientific spirit of his social milieu, and made no mean contribution towards building up the foundation of sociology in India. Had he lived long enough, he could have moulded the ideas borrowed from western scholars into a coherent social scientific framework that would bear the stamp of his originality. His stress on psychology, in course of his criticism of Comte, warrants the speculation that he would have given a psychological orientation to sociology. Again, his emphasis on the influence of the physical environment on society could be construed as an indication that as a mature sociologist he would have probably belonged to what Sorokin calls the geographical school of sociology. Many possibilities lay dormant in him, and it is, after all, no use speculating along which line his sociological ideas would have developed, given the span of time necessary for the crystalisation of his insights and perceptions. Standing at this distance of time, about a century since his passing away, it may be difficult for us to evaluate his contributions to sociology in the historical perspective of his times. But no discerning reader can fail to find in Rajkrishna's sociological writings glimpses of a great scientific mind, traces of an assiduous learning, and visions of a science of society emerging through mists of erroneous beliefs. Rajkrishna Mukherjee may not have given us a fully developed sociology, but he has certainly given us an impetus to study society scientifically and to liberate our intellect from the



shackles of traditional beliefs. As such, Rajkrishna deserves our respectful remembrance as a promising pioneer of sociology in India, and his sociological essays deserve a niche in the repertoire of Indian sociology.

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## BHUDEV MUKHOPADHYAY AND ETHNOSOCIOLOGY OF THE CASTE SYSTEM—A SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY ?

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GAYATRI BHATTACHARYYA

Each idea has an ancestry. Sociology in India is no exception in this regard. A look into the way our ancestors viewed the social processes in India is particularly necessary today when a serious concern has been expressed regarding the applicability of the concepts, methods and theoretical models developed in a different cultural context, i. e., that of the western civilization. Sociology, as is well known, developed in the west as a response to two Revolutions. But one does not find any equivalent situation in the Indian context. Sociology, in India, as a distinct academic discipline developed as a response to the country's contact with the British. But to say that would be tantamount to giving a half-told account.

Sociology in India has a long past. Reflections on aspects social are found in the writings of the early and the medieval texts and literature. These reflections got a new lease of life during the British Raj. This paper attempts to unfold the writings of Bhudev Chandra Mukhopadhyay, a nineteenth century thinker, on the caste system in India.

Bhudev Chandra Mukhopadhyay hailed from a conservative Brahman family. He was trained in Sanskrit grammar and literature. But the contemporary social atmosphere drew him to learning English. In English education, he always found an attacking attitude towards the indigenous system, which pulled him back to Sanskrit education. Sanskrit education left an unchanging impact on Bhudev. Bhudev's period was a period of nascent nationalism. People

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understood that *reform* of the society and freedom were necessary. But how to achieve them? Responses to it were different. Some wanted to imitate the British, others disowned their hereditary customs and practices and went in for everything European. At such a critical period of Bengal's history, Bhudev showed through a number of writings the rationale behind the maintenance of the different indigenous social institutions and practices. He wrote pieces like *Paribarik Prabandha* (Essays on Family), *Samajik Prabandha* (Essays on Society), *Swapnalabddha Bharatbarsher Itihas* (Indian History as visualised through a Dream), *Anguriyo Binimoy* (Exchange of Rings), *Achara Prabandha* (Essays on Ceremonies) and a number of articles and essays on education. An interesting feature of these writings is *an emphasis on culture specificity. And what is more important is that in Samajik Prabandha, Bhudev just shows how the principles of a so-called universal science of society which was developed in the west fail to explain the nuances of social life in a different culture context.* It may be worthwhile to consider Bhudev's contribution from an ethnosociological point of view as well.

Taking its cue from ethnomethodology, ethnosociology aims at an analysis of the intersubjective character of the social world, the nature of common sense knowledge and the practical orientation of social actors. A start toward this was made in the socio-anthropological parlour ever since the incorporation of the emic approach in Franz Boas' teaching of ethnological methods which emphasized the importance of collecting data in the form of verbatim texts from informants in order to preserve the original (i.e., the *native*) meaning of the information.

This emphasis on the cognitive world of the members of the group under study is particularly important for the study of a society like India where one finds a long continued tradition. The study of any aspect of such a society, as Kenneth David remarks, "requires a longer commitment, a commitment that does not exclude becoming a part-time historian, Dravidianist, Sanskritist or whatever. It also demands recognition that previous distinctions such as "the analyst's unconscious model" versus "the native conscious model" or "what they say" versus "what they do" are not powerful enough to deal with a society that includes various levels of symbolic texts

such as sastra and purana ; intermediary texts such as enacted (chanted) ritual texts, prayers, songs sung at weddings by women, caste origin myths, and street plays ; and verbal statements by informants of various degrees of initiate and pragmatic knowledge". 1977 : 51-52).

This distinctiveness of cultures of South Asia has led McKim Marriott to develop Ethnosociology which emphasizes "subjectively, that is, cognitively,.....what most actors in South Asia are themselves assuming in being parts of their kind of social organisation". This ethnosociology is marked by (a) monism, (b) substantia-  
 lism and (c) dynamism. The South Asians, for example, do not make any distinction between culture and biology, spirit and matter, abstract and concrete or code and substance. The South Asian ethnosociologist could readily agree that mankind is ultimately one, having been generated through transformations of one, but would insist that cultures must therefore also have been generated out of one. All diversity, all the seeming particularity, of the world has come out of the body of God, according to widespread South Asian thought, and all diversity may ultimately return to one. Again, according to South Asian, indigenous thought, status or rank is an outcome of "vertical solidarity" (a term coined by M. N. Srinivas). The state of solidarity of the South Asian village community is a state of substantial order.

*Coded substances deriving from the locality*, e. g., food, water, land or even the sight of it, may be transferred among persons from one caste to another. But at the same time, this indigenous sociology does not stand static. It generates variety and change from within itself by processes of combination and exchange. A person may, for example, accept a profession which does not coincide with his hereditary one. But still the monistic view and the substantial coding of solidarity endure.

This ethnosociology of McKim Marriott has cast emphasis on a very important aspect of Indian sociology and also points to a method of studying the Indian society. At the same time such a view of looking at the Indian society raises the serious question : Should there be one universal science of society ? The same question, as has already been pointed out, was discussed by Bhudev Chandra

Mukhopadhyay in the middle of the nineteenth century. During his time, the English-educated Indians, coming in contact with the British, began disowning their own tradition and values. Bhudev was pained to see this and his central concern was to save the traditional religion and culture from the onslaught of the British incursion. He was in search of a harmonious social order and he tried to show, with his penetrating analysis, how the indigenous social institutions helped the process. In doing so, he came, unknowingly though, to a position very much akin to that of an ethnosociologist. An attempt has been made below to show how Bhudev's discussion on the caste system in India may be viewed from an ethnosociological perspective.

It must be remembered that Bhudev's ethno-sociology of the caste system of India stems from an acute awareness of the need for protecting the institution from an assault of various reforms rushing on it from various corners. Bhudev first discusses the general features of the system. And the system is shown in his analysis to be characterised by a notion of monism. These are, he points out, embracing a particular hereditary occupation, conglomeration of different trading groups into units and the submission of all trading groups to a priestly community. These are the *général* features of the system since a system with such characteristics is found all over the world. But in India, the occupational division is much more manifest than in the other parts of the globe. Occupational divisions in India, particularly in the Hindu Society, are closely associated with the rules of interdining and intermarriage. Bhudev notices that the Britishers and a section of the English-educated Indians pointed out that such divisions result in further divisiveness in the society, which is definitely contradictory to a harmonious development of a nation as it works contrary to the principles of equality. In the absence of this equality, according to the critics, the people of India cannot unite.

Bhudev further notices that the critics are divided in their opinions in their judgements against the ill-effects of the caste system. First come the European economists. Caste-based occupational divisions would result in, according to the European economists, utter poverty of the nation which may ultimately threaten the

existence of the country itself. (1375 B. S. [1969], 193). “ইউরোপীয় অর্থনীতিকেরা বলেন যে লোকে বাহার যে ব্যবসায়ে ইচ্ছা সেই ব্যবসায় অবলম্বন করিতে না পাইলে, সমাজের ধনবস্তার কথা দূরে থাকুক, তাহার জীবন রক্ষাই দুরূহ হইয়া পড়ে।” To substantiate their view, the European economists refer to a hypothetical case.

‘A particular country produces, for example, grains, clothes, salt, oil and other consumer goods necessary for the people of that country.’ Let us suppose that a particular commodity like oil is suddenly being imported to that country and the quality of the imported oil is better than that of the indigenous one and the former is less costly than the latter. In such a case, the people of the country would obviously use the imported oil and the trade of the indigenous traders would gradually get abolished. The indigenous traders, for the sake of their maintenance, should, therefore, take another occupation. If they are not so allowed, the economists point out, they (the oilmen) would die of utter poverty. Such a situation is equally applicable to all trades and hence the choice of occupation should be kept free.

The second group of critics refers to an educational principle which is, they allege, affected by caste divisions. The principle states that different people have different aptitudes. If individuals are allowed to accept occupations according to their personal inclinations, the trades can then develop properly. The emphasis on hereditary occupation is not, therefore, congenial to the well-being of the profession itself. (ibid. ; 195). “ব্যক্তিভেদে প্রবৃত্তির ভেদ থাকে, যে বাহার আপনাপন প্রবৃত্তির অনুযায়ী ব্যবসায় অবলম্বন করিলেই সে ব্যবসায়ের উন্নতি হয়। এই জন্য পুরুষানুক্রমে কোন এক ব্যবসায় লোকের নিবদ্ধ হওয়া ভাল নয়।”

The third category of critics is represented by the historical evolutionists. The evolutionists point out that the system of caste divisions was present at one time in all the European countries and the remnants of such a system are still prevalent in the remote villages of Europe. The men of these villages accept their ancestors' occupations and intermarriage takes place between groups having the same occupation. But such a system of accepting a hereditary occupation cannot be found in any large urban area. Such is the rule of the society—the evolutionists point out, and hence the caste system, as it is found in India, should, in accordance with the general historical principles, be abolished.

Three other points of criticism from the economic, educational and social standpoints follow from these criticisms of the system : They are (1) a strong feeling of unity cannot develop in society if it is divided in itself on matters like interdining and intermarriage'. (SP ; 1968 : 197). ("খাওয়া-দাওয়ার এবং বৈবাহিক সম্বন্ধের কোন প্রতিবন্ধকতা থাকিলে, সমাজের মধ্যে দৃঢ় সম্মিলন জন্মে না।"). (2) The caste division is injurious to equality. (ibid. ; 197). ("জাতিভেদ স্বীকারে সাম্যের অপলাপ হয়।"). (3) The *Vedas* do not contain any distinct reference to the system of caste divisions (ibid. ; 197). ("জাতিভেদের কথা বেদে তেমন স্পষ্টতঃ উক্ত হয় নাই।").

It may again be pointed out here that the above criticisms were offered against the caste system not merely by the British but also by the majority of the English-educated new intelligentsia. Interestingly enough, Bhudev observes that the Indians have always been looked down upon as a subjugated people by the British. The British masters consider the Indians as servile and sub-servient to them. The servile do not have any loyalty in the real sense of the term. The domination of the masters over the servile subjects originate from (1) the control over the wealth and property of the people and (2) from a feeling of aristocracy cherished by the former and recognised by the latter. So the ordinary Englishman would always deny both the things to the servile subjects, the Indians. As a natural consequence, the aristocracy of the Brahmins is an eyesore to the English. In India, one who does not favour the natural aristocracy of the Brahmins cannot favour the caste system. (SP ; 1969 : 198).

Bhudev here tries to expose the real cause of the British opposition to the caste system of the Hindus. It does not emanate so much from their veneration for egalitarianism and wellbeing of the common Indians as from their harbouring a sense of inequality with the native subjects of India. The latter are unfit for any sense of aristocracy and dignity and therefore, any social institution which may, in any way, nurture the sense of dignity and aristocracy for any section of it is intolerable for the British, the ruling race. One wonders whether this kind of appreciation of the British opposition to the caste system led Bhudev to vindicate the rationale of the caste system which was for him an indicator of the separate identity and the corresponding sense of dignity of the Hindus who were subjected and shorn of any sense of honour by the British rulers.

Bhudev notes, however, that the British have been expedient enough not to betray their hatred for the Brahmans, the natural aristocrats among the Hindus, and the caste system which was the carrier of this natural aristocracy. No doubt, they introduced certain reforms but they did it at the instance of a section of the English-educated Indians. Examples of these are the Lex Loci Act or Castes Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, Act XV of 1856 enabling widows to remarry, the Special Marriage Act or Act III of 1872 legalising the marriage of the Brahmos and the Age of Consent Act of 1891 which raised the age of marriage of girls to a minimum of 10 years. These have had sometimes a direct and at other times an indirect impact on the indigenous social system and values.

But the caste system has, Bhudev points out, withstood such attacks and criticisms. The principles of the system are much more deep rooted than what the general people think, i.e., the occupational division is not the basic feature of the system. The roots of the caste system lie in nature. And the natural roots of the system are made secure by the prohibition of intercaste marriages, which has hardly been affected by the aforesaid reforms. And there is hardly any possibility, maintains Bhudev, that the reforms would ever touch the core of the caste system. He writes : “ভারতবর্ষের জাতিভেদ প্রণালী শুদ্ধ ব্যবসায় ভেদমূলক নয়, এই প্রকৃত কথাটি না বুঝাতেই এই প্রণালীর প্রতি অনেকটা অযথা নিন্দাবাদ হইয়া থাকে।” People criticise the caste system since they cannot understand that the caste divisions are not simply occupational divisions. (ibid. ; 193). Bhudev cites evidence from the *Manu Samhita* to substantiate his point. He says that in the *Samhita* one gets ample evidence of one caste group taking over the occupation of another. The *Samhita*, for example, states :

Ājīvaṃstu tathoktena brāhmaṇaḥ svena karmaṇā |  
 Jīvet kshatriyadharmeṇa sa hyasya pratyantaraḥ ||  
 Ubhābhyāmpyajāḥkṣu katham syāditi chedbhavet |  
 Kṛṣṇagorakṣamāsthāya jīvedvaiśyasya jīvikām ||

(Ch. 10 ; Slokas 81-82)

If the Brahman cannot maintain himself and his family and kins, he may engage in the occupation of maintaining peace and security in the villages and towns, the occupation which fits the Kshatriyas,



since it is his, *i.e.*, Brahman's occupation to meet the immediate crisis. When the two occupations fail to provide him with the means of livelihood, he may then take to the occupations of trade and agriculture which are reserved in general for the Vaisyas. (The authoress of the paper has made the English rendering of the slokas following the Bengali translation of the same by Sri Srijibnyayatirtha).

Thus the acceptance of an occupation of a particular caste by the members of another caste was not at all prohibited in the caste system. Bhudev points out that of late the British too have started recognising this important fact. Mr. Elphinstone and Mr. Colebrooke have spoken in this light. The analysis of the caste system by the British economists, however, according to Bhudev, is based on a false assumption. They fail to look beyond the principle of the "greatest good of the greatest number", when they advocate the import of oil from another country on the ground of its cheaper cost and better quality in preference to the use of oil produced by the indigenous oilmen and show no regrets for that the indigenous oilmen would be divested of their traditional occupation. The oilmen should, according to these economists, take to some other occupation. But society in India is organised on altogether a different principle.

According to this principle, the oilmen form a veritable part of the society and it is the duty of the society to look after the interests of all its particular segments. The Indian society does this by guaranteeing particular occupations to particular castes by imposing restrictions on articles to be imported and giving thereby some respite to the indigenous traders to develop their own business.

In fact, in India, Bhudev points out, the economic division of labour has got a religious sanction behind it and hence there is no possibility of any social friction. Bhudev thus anticipates Nirmal Kumar Bose who is known for showing this element of social guarantee against the hazards of loss of occupation by any particular caste group, which underlies the economic division of the caste system. "It (the caste system) brought a sense of sharing in a common enterprise among all the elements who formed the total system. *It gave economic security in spite of obvious inequalities ;*

and this security was guaranteed both by law and by custom.” (Bose; 1967 : 221 ; emphasis added).

Certain elements of the caste system thus transpire from above : (a) lack of rigidity so far as the acceptance of occupations is concerned, (b) economic security provided by the occupational division and what is more important, a sense of collective well-being shared and enjoyed by all the segments of the society, and (c) *natural* inequalities. Bhudev argues that these inequalities do not follow from the occupational division of labour.

The reason behind the continuity of the caste system, Bhudev argues, lies in that the caste system has got a *natural base* (“*naiṣargik mūla*”). This natural base or the “*naiṣargik mūla*” flows from certain basic differences (“*maulika varṇabheda*”). In India, Bhudev shows, mixed groups (“*miśraṇa jāta*”) of different races like Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Kolerian, Dravidian, Negroid, Polynesians live together from time immemorial. Occupational differentiations in India, Bhudev contends, is in complete concurrence with such racial differences or put in other words, differences in occupation have come about in accordance with differences in birth. (ibid. ; 191). “ব্যবসায় ভেদের সহিত ঐসকল মৌলিক ভেদও মিলিয়া গিয়াছে। অর্থাৎ সাধারণতঃ ব্যবসায়ভেদ-জন্মভেদ অনুসারে ঘটিয়াছে।” ) Bhudev makes a general reference to the *Manu Samhita* where occupations have been ascribed to different groups according to the differences in birth. One may indeed find evidence of the justification of the occupational divisions of the caste system in terms of birth and heredity, in ślokas 87-91 of chapter I of the *Manu Samhita*.

Bhudev, therefore, praises the eugenic principle which he believes to underline the caste system. He quotes with approval the following śloka from the *Manu Samhita*

Viśiṣṭaṃ kutrachidvijaṃ strīyonireba kutrachit |

Ubhayantu samaṃ yatra sã prasūtiḥ praśasyate ||

(Chapter 9 ; sloka.34)

The woman symbolises the field, the man, the seed. The union of the two leads to the creation of the human being. Somewhere one may come across the superiority of the field, elsewhere,

the opposite. But where both the field and the seed are qualitatively similar in nature, the children of such unions are the best. Thanks to this sastric prescription which is, in Bhudev's opinion, scientific and is at the same time substantiated by general experience, inter-caste marriage has been strictly prohibited in India. In fact, *the entire system of caste differentiation revolves round such restrictions on marriage from which flow the other limitations. The latter, in Bhudev's opinion, have been created to maintain the former.* (ibid. ; 199).

(“...ভারতবর্ষে জাতিভেদ প্রথার নৈসর্গিক মূল আছে, এবং যতদিন সেই মূল থাকিবে ততদিন সকল ঘরেই সকল লোকে বিবাহ করিতে পারিবে না। জাতিভেদের মুখ্য তাৎপর্য্য বিবাহ-ভেদ, অন্য কোন ভেদ নয়, বিবাহ-ভেদটিকে রক্ষা করিবার উদ্দেশ্যেই অন্যান্য ভেদের ব্যবস্থা।” )।

Bhudev is insistent on the fact that so long as there will be differences among the Indians in respect of colour and other physical features, the caste system will not cease to continue. According to him, the religious leaders like Buddha, Nanak failed in their attempts to abolish the caste system since they were idealists and visionaries who could not adequately appreciate the *natural* roots of the caste system in the natural divergences of race and colour of the different segments of the Indian population. (ibid. ; 199 and also in *Bibidha Prabandha*, 1311 (B. S.), 1905 : 74). Both in *Samajik Prabandha* (P. 199) and in *Bibidha Prabandha* (P. 74) Bhudev admits the possibility of the disappearance of the caste system when the existing physical and racial differentiations of the different groups of Indians will be obliterated. He expects that the rigidities which earlier characterised the caste system like the restrictions on inter-provincial or inter-linguistic marriages of particular caste groups, viz., the Brahmins living in different provinces or speaking different vernaculars, will slowly disappear since these rigidities and restrictions are not *natural* and the improvement in the system of transport and communication is increasingly bringing people of different regions and linguistic groups closer than before. But this will not affect the restrictions on inter-caste marriage which is the most solid pillar of the caste system as the natural differences in heredity, physique and colour of different caste groups will not be influenced thereby. That may happen only when exchange of women among

different caste groups will occur. But Bhudev would stubbornly oppose to such a fact as unnatural. (BP., 74). “ওরূপ কাণ্ড নরনারীদিগের এবং জন্তু মাত্রেরই অস্বাভাবিক।” Probably Bhudev hints at that in the animal kingdom mating occurs only between the likes. One caste group is *by nature* unlike another caste group. What really is there behind Bhudev’s strong adherence to the perpetuation of the caste system? Some of his arguments have been referred to above. In *Bibidha Prabandha* he refers to as many as six others; some of which are worth considering.

The caste system has got a number of *inherent traits* (lakshana) and *qualities* (guna). In it only the Brahmans are considered the *natural superiors* to all other varnas. Among the rest, no varna can claim the natural superiority to any other varna.

Since the caste system is organised on the principle of the natural qualities of different castes, the pride and rule of wealth and the wealthy do not find a room in it.

Occupational mobility is not totally restricted in the caste system. Since the advent of Buddhism, even the Sudras have been allowed to take to teaching.

Again, thanks to the existence of the system of caste differentiation, a number of fine arts and trades flourished in India. The Dacca textile, the ornaments from Cuttack and the ancient sculpture of the South are famous all over the world and the key behind this fame lies in the harmonious way of living enshrined in the Hindu society.

Because of the existence of the caste system, the Hindu society in the past could assimilate the other societies of India within its fold and in Bhudev’s opinion, this may happen in the future as well. Bhudev adds, “Perhaps it is difficult to very intimately interact, say, to interdine with people from other communities. But some kind of interaction with them becomes possible if they are taken as a distinct caste group within the society (i.e., the Hindu society). (B.P., 75). ( “একেবারে ভিন্ন সমাজের লোককে লইয়া তাহাদিগের সহিত আহার ব্যবহারাদির প্রচলন করা কঠিন। উহাদিগকে সমাজান্তর্গত একটি জাতিরূপে গণ্য করা তত কঠিন নয়। ” ). Bhudev draws attention to the various tribes like the Santals, the Mechs coming within the fold of the Hindu society and gradually becoming ‘jal-acharaniyas’.

Bhudev discovers in the process the essential dynamism of the Hindu society and its essential respect for the autochthones as living collectivities and not as inert entities. (cf. also SP., 19). “আদিম অধিবাসীদের প্রতি হিন্দু সমাজের সজীববৎ ব্যবহার দেখ।” Bhudev’s brief but incisive comment and analysis anticipate the theories of N. K. Bose and G. S. Ghurye regarding the Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption. Bhudev notices that only 92 lakhs of tribals remain in his time outside the mainstream of the Hindu society. (SP., 19). In *Bibidha Prabandha* Bhudev further notices how the Vaisnavas who originally revolted against the caste system have turned into a separate caste within the caste system. The Muslims too consider themselves as a separate caste within and thus a part of the Hindu society. In *Samajik Prabandha* too he observes that with the exceptions of the Christians and the Parsis, different religious groups other than the Hindus, viz., the Buddhists, the Jains, etc. consider themselves as parts or branches of the Hindu society and share, therefore, a national sentiment.

Bhudev finds in the caste system an institution that has contributed to the development of the national sentiment and uniqueness of the people of India.

Bhudev was a service-holder under the British Government. He did not rise in revolt against it. He probably had an admiration for certain aspects of the British Raj in India. He sensed at the same time most acutely its threat to the identity of the Hindus and the Hindu society. He was, therefore, overzealous in his support for different institutions of the Hindus. His conservatism was probably an expression of his reaction to the state of subservience of the Indians to a foreign power with an overwhelming might. As he himself writes in the *Bibidha Prabandha*, he attended the invitations by the Englishmen but he did not take food in their houses in spite of repeated requests from the hosts. On one such occasion he observed, “... Just think; what else do we have? Our political independence is lost, our religion is under attack by you, our literature has not assumed such a standard as can create a sense of pride in us. What else, then, remains which can preserve our identity and glory? What is left is our rites and rituals, inhibitions and prohibitions operating on the principle of caste-division. You may call

them social codes or superstitions. I cannot sacrifice even this last badge of our distinctiveness and identity at your request.” (BP., 92).

Bhudev writes, “He who is devoid of any prejudice and superstition is the man with the highest wisdom or the man who has been robbed of everything that could distinguish him from the others. None of us is the man with the highest wisdom and it is also not necessary to be a man robbed of any mark of identity.” (BP., 93).

[“...প্রত্যত সকল প্রকার কুসংস্কারবিকৃত ব্যক্তি যদি কেহ থাকেন, তিনি হয় পরম জ্ঞানী অথবা “সবলোঠ” হইবেন—আমরা কেহই পরম জ্ঞানী নহি, “সবলোঠ” হওয়া অনাবশ্যক।”]

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## A CRITICAL LOOK AT 'POSITIVISM' OF BENOY KUMAR SARKAR

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SWAPAN KUMAR BHATTACHARYYA

Benoy Kumar Sarkar, a pioneer in Indian sociology, became widely known for *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* (1914, 1921, 1937). The name of Auguste Comte and his idea of positivism were no strange elements in the intellectual environs of Sarkar. Indira Sarkar marks 1860 as the year of advent of positivism in the intellectual life of Bengal (1949 : 10). Benoy Kumar, however, used the term positivism in a special sense.

Sarkar writes in the introduction to the first edition of PBHS, "It has been supposed...that Hindu civilisation is essentially non-industrial, and non-political...and that its sole feature is ultra-asceticism and over religiosity which delight in condemning the 'World, the Flesh and the Devil' !

Nothing can be further from the truth...

The Hindu has never been a 'scorner of the ground', but always 'true, to the kindred points heaven and home', has been solicitous to enjoy the good things of this earthly earth and beautify the 'orb of green'. The literature, fine arts, religious consciousness, industrial life, political organisation, etc., of the Hindus—all have sought to realise this synthesis and harmony between the eternal antitheses and polarities of the universe : the worldly and the other-worldly, the positive and the transcendental....." (1914 : x-xi ; repeated in 1937 : 6).

If the above lines highlight the nature of Hindu positivism, Sarkar's *Chinese Religion through Hindu Eyes* describes the character of "Asiatic Positivism" (1916 : 72-79). He points out, "If the term ['positivism'] be applied to any inculcation of *humanitarian principles* or *social duties* and the like, every religion is surely *positivistic* and every human being has been a *positivist*" (ibid : 73 ; emphasis added).

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In this respect there is hardly any distinction among Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism. And Sarkar immediately adds, "I need only point out that the religion or morality of good citizenship, social service and humanitarianism has been in India along with, in spite of, and even in and through, every so-called *ism*. One word *Nirvāna* does not explain three thousand years of Hindu culture (ibid. : 78-79).

Sarkar farther elaborates the meaning of which he reads in positivism in the final edition of PBHS : "It is clear that the word 'Positive' is being used in the sense popularized by Comte's *Course de Philosophie Positive*" (1937 : 10). In Comte's theory of three stages of evolution of human intellect and social organisation the third stage "is the 'positive stage' and is the 'age' of speciality and generality...and the *etat positif* is marked by the reign of 'experience'. In Comte's judgement humanity has been marching towards a stage in which positive knowledge or scientific experience is dominant." (ibid. : 10-11)

"But it should," Sarkar continues "be observed at once that the only *liaison* of the *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* with Comte's *Philosophie Positive* lies in the value he attaches to the category 'positive'. It is simply the association of scholarly brains, exact knowledge, experience or experiment, generalization, specialization, science as antithesis of religion etc., with positivism that is utilized in the present study. Comte's analysis of mental 'stages' in evolution or 'ages' of the human mind, however, is not accepted here." (ibid. : 11)

Though Sarkar used the terms, "positive" and "positivism", in the restricted sense spelt out above in his relentless fight against the view that the Hindus were otherworldly, there is, refreshingly enough, evidence of Sarkar's awareness of the manifold implications of "positivism" and of the influence of positivism as a mode of analysing social events on his discourses.

## II

Sarkar has tried to grapple with the antinomies of natural science and history and allied disciplines dealing with the events of human life, of the fact of cultural specificities of actual societies in history



and the need for understanding the nature of human society in general and of the laws of social evolution, of external objects and the subject studying them. And, positivism of a certain kind lurked behind Sarkar's discussion of the methods to be followed in natural as well as "mental and moral sciences", though his understanding of positivism lacks in the sophistication of sociologists and philosophers of today.

"Positivism always involves," points out Alastair MacIntyre, "taking natural science (rather than, for example, history) as the paradigm of human knowledge, and always taking a particular view of the nature of science. But even on this latter topic so-called positivists have held such different views that the term is scarcely illuminating without further explanation (in Mitchell (ed.), 1979 : 145). The last-mentioned difficulty does not of course, hinder one's understanding of the core-meaning of positivism. Positivism implies, according to Kolakowski, "a phenomenal, nominal conception of science" (1972 : 16). The feature of *phenomenalism* suggests that the distinction between essence and phenomenon should be eliminated from science, since it is misleading. Positivists object to any accounting for a phenomenon in terms of occult entities that are by definition inaccessible to human knowledge" (ibid : 12). *Nominalism* rules out any assumption that any insight formulated in general terms can have any real referents other than individual concrete objects. The above characteristic also suggests "the rule that refuses to call value judgements and normative statements knowledge" (ibid. : 16). Finally, in positivist philosophy there is a belief in the essential *unity of the scientific method*.

The preceding analysis of positivism contains the notion that science has the ability to predict results (Fay, 1977 : 21 and Kolakowski, op. cit. : 15). Talcott Parsons calls positivistic any social theory which "involves explicitly or implicitly...the view that positivist science constitutes man's sole possible significant relation to external (non-ego) reality, man as actor that is" (1968 : 61). By this he indicates any system in which it is assumed that human action can be adequately characterised without regard to the agent's own standpoint.

Some of the elements of positivism depicted above are clearly

discernible in the writings of Sarkar. Take, for example, the following observation of Sarkar : "Human civilization like physical facts and phenomena require to be studied in such a way as to lead to the detection of uniformities in the sequences and co-existences of social movements. History has to be put on the same level with Physics and the Natural Sciences, so that predictions may be possible in the social world as in the physical" (1912c : pref.). Then, two aspects of science are mentioned by Sarkar—"positive or theoretical, and practical or applied" (1913 : 63). "As a positive study, science confines itself to the investigation of facts and phenomena, as they are and have been, how they happen, their interconnections and interdependences" (*idem*). The theoretical investigator hardly expresses any concern with "the ethical or utilitarian considerations" (*ibid.* : 64). But as an applied or practical study, science has certain "definite aims to further and has to devise ways and means for their fulfilment. The investigator is not merely satisfied with the knowledge of the processes and the abstract truths regarding the phenomena ; his chief concern is the uses to which truths may be applied and the work that may be done with them" (*idem*).

Thus, one part of science "merely discovers principles and laws and establishes truths, the other applies those rules to practical purposes and actually ministers to social well being...The latter of these functions stands upon the former, inasmuch as it is the positive knowledge of truth about a matter that furnishes a basis for the practical man, and inadequate information is of very little help in guiding actual course of action. And so the applied sciences are based on the positive" (*ibid.* : 64-65). The preceding statements immediately bring to one's mind the positivist dictum of Comte which says, "Science whence comes prediction, prediction whence comes action" (cited in Flew (ed), 1984 : 283). Sarkar sought to demonstrate the truth of his observations with examples of Economics, Political Science, Sociology and the Science of education. He desired, it is clear, to upgrade history and other disciplines dealing with human and social phenomena to the plane of natural sciences. Alongside this aspiration, another strand emphasizing the peculiarities of history and the socio-cultural phenomena may be detected at least in the writings during the earlier part of Sarkar's career.

In essays like "Itihaser Upades" ("The Lessons of History", 1912 : 1-16), "Adhunik Bharat" ("Modern India", *ibid.* : 47-62), "Europe O Bharat" ("Europe and India," *ibid.* : 117-131), and "Amader Jatiya Charitra" ("Our National Character", 1912 a : 76-89) and particularly in his lecture, "Vidyalaya Dharmasiksha" (1912 b 97-124) or *The Pedagogy of the Hindus*, Sarkar, a nationalist of the Swadeshi days, tirelessly harped on the specificity of the Indian (Hindu) culture, and, therefore, on the need for indigenisation of the elements brought to it by the western civilization, on the need for adapting them to its genius. This concern with a proper understanding of the specificity of Indian culture and society came to influence his thoughts about what Sarkar called "Methods of Human Science" in his small but important piece, *Introduction to the Science of Education* (1913), citations from which have already been presented.

Sarkar's enchantment with Science is, of course, manifest at the initial page of the work. Diverse methods may have to be adopted to get a perfect mastery over a subject. "And the truths that are discovered with the help of these various methods of investigation have to be placed in a systematic order, their mutual relations and coordinations have to be explained and adjusted, their unity and harmony organized on a rational basis before they can constitute what is technically called a science (*ibid.* : 1). Add to this Sarkar's strong advocacy of the inductive method of teaching which would, he expected, enable a student to proceed from the known to the unknown, according to the different stages of his development and give him the pleasure of actively exercising his own powers of observation and experiment (*ibid.* : 74-75) and his praise for the inductive method which would enable the students as well as the investigators "to systematize and methodize the results of these individual investigations and find out the unity in the diversity and the general principle underlying the varied instances." (*ibid.* : 11).

At the same time, Sarkar recognised the difficulties presented by the special nature of the subject matter of the human 'sciences'. "...Religious and political subjects, social and legal topics, and phenomena of Arts and Literature which are essentially human in

their nature, having their origin in manifold aspects of man and his life, and the arts and institutions of civilization which depend for their progression, retrogression and evolution upon the living and active faculties of the human mind, present peculiar difficulties to the investigator because of their inherent intricacies and complexities. These subtle, ever-changing and ever-growing processes of psychical world are evidently not to be attacked by the methods which a scientist adopts to investigate the simple and palpable facts relating to lifeless objects and organisms of lower orders. In such cases varying methods have to be adopted to suit the complex facts relating to each class of phenomena (ibid. : 34-35 ; emphasis added).

Since the facts and the phenomena of the human world are the creations of ever-ingenuous, ever-creative or 'progressive' human mind, "there is no fixity and stationariness in human affairs and institutions. Every moment a need is taking place of the old, and thus a 'history' is being made ; and on account of such incessant changes *history never repeats itself, but displays novel types and situations at every stage*" (ibid. : 36 ; emphasis added). To gain an adequate knowledge of the running stream of human history, one must acquaint oneself with the varieties and peculiarities that have characterised human civilisation in its different epochs and centres. This is the nature of the historical enquiry. And the "historical enquiry is...the apt method of investigating social phenomena and the proper foundation of the sciences of man." (ibid. : 38).

Logic, Ethics, Economics, Politics, Psychology and Sociology are, according to Sarkar, the human sciences other than history. "The subject-matter of these sciences is human mind and character—the ideals and institutions of man and as such is very complex and intricate" (ibid. : 100). There is a farther delineation of the scope and subject-matter of sociology in the following..."the actual manners, customs, usages of various peoples, their rules and ceremonies, must receive the student's fullest consideration, if he wants to discover the *spirit* that underlies them. To the students of Sociology the facts and phenomena of social life, the institutions and practices through which man displays his inner nature and spiritual characteristics have the greatest importance" (ibid. : 105). Thus, the aim of sociology appeared to Sarkar at least in the initial

stages to understand the *spirit* or meaning beneath the manners and customs and other social phenomena and it called for an appropriate methodology : "On account of the complexities and ramifications inherent in the mental and moral phenomena, these sciences have an abstract subtlety and a metaphysical character peculiar to themselves (ibid. : 100-101). Hence the establishment of generalisations and universal principles in the disciplines dealing with these phenomena is possible only "in subsequent stages after a careful analysis of the individual cases and comparison and contrast between them. Not the laws but the facts, not 'general principles but 'particular' events of mental and moral life, the affairs of the economic and political world, are to be regarded as the proper subjects of study" (ibid. : 101-102). Sarkar warns, "Such knowledge as does not supply one with the types of human culture and differences in the standpoints and objectives of man under the different sets of circumstances is quite useless for practical purposes of advice and guidance in the actual world" (ibid. : 38-39).

Sarkar appeared to take an epistemological position in the succeeding statement, which might lead to interesting results : "The knowledge of man about the universe grows and expands round self-knowledge,—the knowledge about one's identity, continuity, and individuality as the centre and nucleus of all truths. It is the perception of the self that is the foundation of all other perceptions, that makes observation of, and inferences about, non-self possible. It is by placing the external objects in contact with the non-self and realizing the relations of one's own body and mind with the surrounding environment, both physical and human, that man acquires and develops his intelligence and thinking powers" (ibid. : 88-89). There is an apparent precedence of the subject over the object. But the entire subject-object controversy, particularity-generalality dispute, is summarily put an end to and substituted by an overly positivistic concern with generalisations and universal laws of human and social behaviour.

The ultimate object of all efforts towards gaining an intimate acquaintance with "the vastness, variety, and complexity of the intellectual, social, political and economic spheres of human activity" (ibid. : 119-120) is to discover that "there are certain deep-seated

characteristics which are common to all times and all ages, that are permanent and universal ingredients of human nature itself.... These supply the fundamental unity and basal uniformity pervading the whole human society—underlying the thousand and one differences and types of mental and physical outfit (ibid. : 42).

Through a judicious application of (1) the Historical method dealing with the facts furnished by History, the record of changes and movements in civilization and (2) the Philosophical method exhibiting the fixed and permanent characteristics of human life and civilization, unities and uniformities of ideals, the students of human sciences would see through the veneer of “the series of vicissitudes, that constitute the life and soul of civilization” the truth that “there are certain common characteristics of human nature which have made man essentially a gregarious and political animal” (ibid. : 44-45). “Analyse the human mind and the very nature of man or his society at any one of its stages, and facts will at once be disclosed as to whether the association between man and man is indispensable or whether he can supply all his wants independently or other’s help. No historical enquiry is necessary for such an investigation” (ibid. : 45).

The mind of Sarkar hitherto oscillating between the enquiry into the nature of “the varying needs of societies” (ibid. : 48), the genius of the nation” (ibid. : 59), “the substructure of national sentiment”, “Freedom, Race, Tradition” of specific collectivities in history, on the one hand and the search for eternal verities of human nature and society on the other is thus finally set at rest through a confirmation of the positive method which recognises, as Comte puts it, “the philosophical preponderance of the spirit of the whole over the spirit of detail” (Comte in *Positive Philosophy*, Vol. II ; cited in Thompson, 1976 : 114). Sarkar seems to be heavily influenced by Comte’s assertion that, “In our search for the laws of society, we shall find that exceptional events and minute details must be discarded as essentially insignificant, while science lays hold of the most general phenomena which everybody is familiar with, as constituting the basis of ordinary social life” (ibid. : 173) and that “every law of social succession disclosed by the historical method, must be unquestionably connected, with the positive theory of human nature....” (ibid. : 114).

Sarkar gives, of course, many twists and turns to what he receives from the founding father of positivism. He thinks, for example, that a study of concrete and living facts of materials of national life will reveal "the similarity of life that exists between the ancients and the modern peoples and of those who are to come." This deviation from Comte's idea of stages of progress is obviously related to Sarkar's favourite thesis that the Indians with an ancient heritage are not fundamentally different from the people in modern west and are capable of meeting the challenges of the latter.

This emphasis on similarity between the Hindus and the western people led him to support positivism with a degree of overenthusiasm which proved to be devastating for the very kernel of positivism. The term 'positive' in positivism is intended to convey a warning against the attempts of theology and metaphysics to go beyond the world given to observation in order to enquire into the first causes and ultimate ends. It is, of course, true that, for the positivists also, "the questions of the essential nature of science, and whether all our knowledge, properly so called, could ever in principle be reduced to science, untainted by theology or metaphysics, are still matters of debate" (Flew (ed.), 1984 : 284). But, it is far from their comprehension that theology or metaphysics belongs, as Sarkar opines, to the domain of the positive. Sarkar writes, "...both in subject-matter and methodology all the mental sciences,—psychology, pedagogics, economics, politics, sociology, aesthetics, *religion, metaphysics and what not—are positive*, with very little exceptions, if any" (op. cit. : 39 ; emphasis added).

One understands Sarkar when he says that God, soul or the other world are to an extent illusory, since they elude the five senses of man (Sarkar in Mukhopadhyay, 1944 : 211) or if he does not consider Vedic knowledge to have contained anything "which can be rationally as in any sense more worthwhile than the teachings of all the other branches of learning [of the Hindus] put together." (1921 : 92). But Sarkar's enthusiasm over positivism is carried too far when he propounds, "There are very few aspects, if any at all, of the human disquisitions about God, the soul, the infinite the here-after, the other-world which can be reasonably described as outside the range of the positive."

How does Sarkar arrive at such a novel conclusion ? The answer is : having recourse to reductionism, "We cannot", writes Sarkar, "seriously fight shy of the question as to how little of the mind, after all, is really non-sensate, non-material, non-positive. Perhaps the thoughts of man relating to the condition after death, the other world, the hereafter, God, and so forth may to a certain extent be conceded as belonging to the realm of the non-objective, non-sensible, extra-mundane, non-positive. And yet, the brain and the nervous system are to be given their dues even in regard to the construction of the ultra-mundane spheres. And to that extent the operations of human intellect bearing on after-death phenomena and the like have ultimately to be grasped as being fastened to the "brass-tags" of positive knowledge. In the operations of human intellect, be it observed *en passant*, are included the 'intuitive' processes also" (*idem*).

Thus there are several shifts in the interpretation of the term, 'positive', which is ultimately reduced to the physiological process. The question is : why does Sarkar take an extreme position like this ? Let Sarkar himself answer it. "The use of the category, positivism, in the sense of the material, rational, worldly, human or secular ideology and achievements can be traced to Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (Paris, 1830, ). It is curious that this kind of positivism was denied to India by orientalists of Eur-America and Asia including India for quite a long time...From Max Müller's *India What Can It Teach Us?* (London, 1883) to Max Weber's *Gesammelte Aufsätze Zur Religionssoziologie* (Tübingen, 1922 ) the learned societies of the world sicklied o'er with this postulate about India being a land of unsecular, non-materialistic, and other worldly attainments" ( *ibid* : 39-40 ). Thus "Sarkar reacted to the Max Weberian interpretation of Hinduism" and "felt the need also to reinterpret the Indian tradition" (singh in Malik (ed.) 19 : 109). He made a frantic effort "to dispel the notion of the 'other-worldly' outlook of the orientals and to examine the process of development of the 'might of man' especially in the Indian context" (Mukherjee, 19 : 41). The question is : did Sarkar succeed in his mission, at least, logically ?

Was not this attempt at reducing "otherworldly" ideas into positive knowledge a recognition of the overwhelming presence



of other-worldly elements in Hindu culture? One may have the impression that Sarkar had to reinterpret "positive" to include theological and metaphysical categories, since he could not wish away the obsession of the Hindus with the world beyond the mundane existence.

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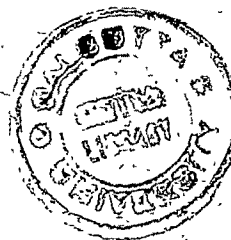
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